The Road-mender

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The Roadmender

The Roadmender

By Michael Fairless

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The Roadmender

By

Michael Fairless

Author of
"The Gathering of Brother Hilarius,"
"The Grey Brethren," etc.

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A. M. D. G.

TO

MY MOTHER:

AND TO EARTH, MY MOTHER.

WHOM I LOVE.

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THE ROADMENDER

I

I HAVE attained my ideal: I am a road-mender, some say stonebreaker. Both titles are correct, but the one is more pregnant than the other. All day I sit by the roadside on a stretch of grass under a high hedge of saplings and a tangle of traveller's joy, woodbine, sweetbriar, and late roses. Opposite me is a white gate, seldom used, if one may judge from the trail of honeysuckle growing tranquilly along it: I know now that whenever and wherever I die my soul will pass out through this white gate; and then, thank God, I shall not have need to undo that trail.

In our youth we discussed our ideals freely: I wonder how many beside myself have attained, or would understand my attaining. After all, what do we ask of life, here or indeed hereafter, but leave to serve, to live, to commune with our fellow-men and with ourselves; and from the lap of earth to look up into the face of God? All these gifts are mine as I

sit by the winding white road and serve the footsteps of my fellows. There is no room in my life for avarice or anxiety; I who serve at the altar live of the altar: I lack nothing but have nothing over; and when the winter of life comes I shall join the company of weary old men who sit on the sunny side of the workhouse wall and wait for the tender mercies of God.

Just now it is the summer of things; there is life and music everywhere—in the stones themselves, and I live to-day beating out the rhythmical hammer-song of The Ring. There is real physical joy in the rise and swing of the arm, in the jar of a fair stroke, the split and scatter of the quartz: I am learning to be ambidextrous, for why should Esau sell his birthright when there is enough for both? Then the rest-hour comes, bringing the luxurious ache of tired but not weary limbs; and I lie outstretched and renew my strength, sometimes with my face deep-nestled in the cool green grass, sometimes on my back looking up into the blue sky which no wise man would wish to fathom.

The birds have no fear of me; am I not also of the brown brethren in my sober fustian livery? They share my meals—at least the little dun-coated Franciscans do; the blackbirds and thrushes care not a whit for such simple food as crumbs, but with legs well apart and claws tense with purchase they disinter poor brother worm, having first mocked him with sound of rain. The robin that lives by the gate regards my heap of stones as subject to his special inspection. He sits atop and practises the trill of his summer song until it shrills above and through the metallic clang of my strokes; and when I pause he cocks his tail, with a humorous twinkle of his round eye which means—"What! shirking, big brother?"—and I fall, ashamed, to my mending of roads.

The other day, as I lay with my face in the grass, I heard a gentle rustle, and raised my head to find a hedge-snake watching me fearless, unwinking. I stretched out my hand, picked it up unresisting, and put it in my coat like the husbandman of old. Was he so ill-rewarded, I wonder, with the kiss that reveals

secrets? My snake slept in peace while I hammered away with an odd quickening of heart as I thought how to me, as to Melampus, had come the messenger—had come, but to ears deafened by centuries of misrule, blindness, and oppression; so that, with all my longing, I am shut out of the wondrous world where walked Melampus and the Saint. To me there is no suggestion of evil in the little silent creatures, harmless, or deadly only with the Death which is Life. The beasts who turn upon us, as a rule maul and tear unreflectingly; with the snake there is the swift, silent strike, the tiny, tiny wound, then sleep and a forgetting.

My brown friend, with its message unspoken, slid away into the grass at sundown to tell its tale in unstopped ears; and I, my task done, went home across the fields to the solitary cottage where I lodge. It is old and decrepit—two rooms, with a quasi-attic over them reached by a ladder from the kitchen and reached only by me. It is furnished with the luxuries of life, a truckle bed, table, chair, and huge earthenware pan which I fill from the

ice-cold well at the back of the cottage. Morning and night I serve with the Gibeonites, their curse my blessing, as no doubt it was theirs when their hearts were purged by service. Morning and night I send down the moss-grown bucket with its urgent message from a dry and dusty world; the chain tightens through my hand as the liquid treasure responds to the messenger, and then with creak and jangle —the welcome of labouring earth— the bucket slowly nears the top and disperses the treasure in the waiting vessels. The Gibeonites were servants in the house of God, ministers of the sacrament of service even as the High Priest himself; and I, sharing their high office of servitude, thank God that the ground was accursed for my sake, for surely that curse was the womb of all unborn blessing.

The old widow with whom I lodge has been deaf for the last twenty years. She speaks in the strained high voice which protests against her own infirmity, and her eyes have the pathetic look of those who search in silence. For many years she lived alone with her son, who laboured on the farm two miles away.

He met his death rescuing a carthorse from its burning stable; and the farmer gave the cottage rent free and a weekly half-crown for life to the poor old woman whose dearest terror was the workhouse. With my shilling a week rent, and sharing of supplies, we live in the lines of comfort. Of death she has no fears, for in the long chest in the kitchen lie a web of coarse white linen, two pennies covered with the same to keep down tired eyelids, decent white stockings, and a white cotton sun-bonnet—a decorous death-suit truly—and enough money in the little bag for self-respecting burial. The farmer buried his servant handsomely—good man, he knew the love of reticent grief for a "kind" burial—and one day Harry's mother is to lie beside him in the little churchyard which has been a cornfield, and may some day be one again.

II

ON Sundays my feet take ever the same way. First my temple service, and then five miles tramp over the tender, dewy fields, with their ineffable earthy smell, until I reach the little church at the foot of the grey-green down. Here, every Sunday, a young priest from a neighbouring village says Mass for the tiny hamlet, where all are very old or very young—for the heyday of life has no part under the long shadow of the hills, but is away at sea or in service. There is a beautiful seemliness in the extreme youth of the priest who serves these aged children of God. He bends to communicate them with the reverent tenderness of a son, and reads with the careful intonation of far-seeing love. To the old people he is the son of their old age, God-sent to guide their tottering footsteps along the highway of foolish wayfarers; and he, with his youth and strength, wishes no better task. Service ended, we greet each other friendly—

for men should not be strange in the acre of God; and I pass through the little hamlet and out and up on the grey down beyond. Here, at the last gate, I pause for breakfast; and then up and on with quickening pulse, and evergreen memory of the weary war-worn Greeks who broke rank to greet the great blue Mother-way that led to home. I stand on the summit hatless, the wind in my hair, the smack of salt on my cheek, all round me roliing stretches of cloud-shadowed down, no sound but the shrill mourn of the peewit and the gathering of the sea.

The hours pass, the shadows lengthen, the sheep-bells clang; and I lie in my niche under the stunted hawthorn watching the to and fro of the sea, and Æolus shepherding his white sheep across the blue. I love the sea with its impenetrable fathoms, its wash and undertow, and rasp of shingle sucked anew. I love it for its secret dead in the Caverns of Peace, of which account must be given when the books are opened and earth and heaven have fled away. Yet in my love there is a paradox, for as I watch the restless, ineffective waves I

think of the measureless, reflective depths of the still and silent Sea of Glass, of the dead, small and great, rich and poor, with the works which follow them, and of the Voice as the voice of many waters, when the multitude of one mind rends heaven with alleluia: and I lie so still that I almost feel the kiss of White Peace on my mouth. Later still, when the flare of the sinking sun has died away and the stars rise out of a veil of purple cloud, I take my way home, down the slopes, through the hamlet, and across miles of sleeping fields over which night has thrown her shifting web of mist—home to the little attic, the deep, cool well, the kindly wrinkled face with its listening eyes—peace in my heart and thankfulness for the rhythm of the road.

Monday brings the joy of work, second only to the Sabbath of rest, and I settle to my heap by the white gate. Soon I hear the distant stamp of horsehoofs, heralding the grind and roll of the wheels which reaches me later—a heavy flour-waggon with a team of four great gentle horses, gay with brass trappings and scarlet ear-caps. On the top of the craftily

piled sacks lies the white-clad waggoner, a pink in his mouth which he mumbles meditatively, and the reins looped over the inactive whip—why should he drive a willing team that knows the journey and responds as strenuously to a cheery chirrup as to the well-directed lash? We greet and pass the time of day, and as he mounts the rise he calls back a warning of coming rain. I am already white with dust as he with flour, sacramental dust, the outward and visible sign of the stir and beat of the heart of labouring life.

Next to pass down the road is an anxious ruffled hen, her speckled breast astir with maternal troubles. She walks delicately, lifting her feet high and glancing furtively from side to side with comb low dressed. The sight of man, the heartless egg-collector, from whose haunts she has fled, wrings from her a startled cluck, and she makes for the white gate, climbs through, and disappears. I know her feelings too well to intrude. Many times already has she hidden herself, amassed four or five precious treasures, brooding over them with anxious hope; and then, after a brief

desertion to seek the necessary food, she has returned to find her efforts at concealment vain, her treasures gone. At last, with the courage of despair she has resolved to brave the terrors of the unknown and seek a haunt beyond the tyranny of man. I will watch over her from afar, and when her mother-hope is fulfilled I will marshall her and her brood back to the farm where she belongs; for what end I care not to think, it is of the mystery which lies at the heart of things; and we are all God's beasts, says St. Augustine.

Here is my stone-song, a paraphrase of the Treasure Motif.

What a wonderful work Wagner has done for humanity in translating the toil of life into the readable script of music! For those who seek the tale of other worlds his magic is silent; but earth-travail under his wand becomes instinct with rhythmic song to an accompaniment of the elements, and the blare

and crash of the bottomless pit itself. The Pilgrim's March is the sad sound of footsore men; the San Graal the tremulous yearning of servitude for richer, deeper bondage. The yellow, thirsty flames lick up the willing sacrifice, the water wails the secret of the river and the sea; the birds and beasts, the shepherd with his pipe, the underground life in rocks and caverns, all cry their message to this nineteenth-century toiling, labouring world—and to me as I mend my road.

Two tramps come and fling themselves by me as I eat my noonday meal. The one, red-eyed, furtive, lies on his side with restless, clutching hands that tear and twist and torture the living grass, while his lips mutter incoherently. The other sits stooped, bare-footed, legs wide apart, his face grey, almost as grey as his stubbly beard; and it is not long since Death looked him in the eyes. He tells me querulously of a two hundred miles tramp since early spring, of search for work, casual jobs with more kicks than halfpence, and a brief but blissful sojourn in a hospital bed, from which he was dismissed with sentence

passed upon him. For himself, he is determined to die on the road under a hedge, where a man can see and breathe. His anxiety is all for his fellow; *he* has said he will " do for a man "; he wants to " swing," to get out of his " dog's life." I watch him as he lies, this Ishmael and would-be Lamech. Ignorance, hunger, terror, the exhaustion of past generations, have done their work. The man is mad, and would kill his fellow-man.

Presently we part, and the two go, dogged and footsore, down the road which is to lead them into the great silence.

III

YESTERDAY was a day of encounters.

First, early in the morning, a young girl came down the road on a bicycle. Her dress-guard was loose, and she stopped to ask for a piece of string. When I had tied it for her she looked at me, at my worn dusty clothes and burnt face; and then she took a Niphetos rose from her belt and laid it shyly in my dirty disfigured palm. I bared my head, and stood hat in hand looking after her as she rode away up the hill. Then I took my treasure and put it in a nest of cool dewy grass under the hedge. *Ecce ancílla Domíni.*

My next visitor was a fellow-worker on his way to a job at the cross-roads. He stood gazing meditatively at my heap of stones.

"'Ow long 'ave yer bin at this job that ye 're in such a hurry?"

I stayed my hammer to answer—"Four months."

"Seen better days?"

"Never," I said emphatically, and punctuated the remark with a stone split neatly in four.

The man surveyed me in silence for a moment; then he said slowly, "Mean ter say yer like crackin' these blamed stones to fill 'oles some other fool 's made ?"

I nodded.

"Well, that beats everything. Now, I 'ave seen better days; worked in a big brewery over near Maidstone—a town that, and something doing; and now, 'ere I am, 'ammering me 'eart out on these blasted stones for a bit o' bread and a pipe o' baccy once a week—it ain't good enough." He pulled a blackened clay from his pocket and began slowly filling it with rank tobacco; then he lit it carefully behind his battered hat, put the spent match back in his pocket, rose to his feet, hitched his braces, and, with a silent nod to me, went on to his job.

Why do we give these tired children, whose minds move slowly, whose eyes are holden that they cannot read the Book, whose hearts are full of sore resentment against they know

not what, such work as this to do—hammering their hearts out for a bit of bread? All the pathos of unreasoning labour rings in these few words. We fit the collar on unwilling necks; and when their service is over we bid them go out free; but we break the good Mosaic law and send them away empty. What wonder there is so little willing service, so few ears ready to be thrust through against the master's door.

The swift stride of civilisation is leaving behind individual effort, and turning man into the Dæmon of a machine. To and fro in front of the long loom, lifting a lever at either end, paces he who once with painstaking intelligence drove the shuttle. *Then* he tasted the joy of completed work, that which his eye had looked upon, and his hands had handled; now his work is as little finished as the web of Penelope. Once the reaper grasped the golden corn stems, and with dexterous sweep of sickle set free the treasure of the earth. Once the creatures of the field were known to him, and his eye caught the flare of scarlet and blue as the frail poppies and sturdy corn-cockles laid

down their beauty at his feet; now he sits serene on Juggernaut's car, its guiding Dæmon, and the field is silent to him.

As with the web and the grain so with the wood and stone in the treasure-house of our needs. The ground was accursed *for our sake* that in the sweat of our brow we might eat bread. Now the many live in the brain-sweat of the few; and it must be so, for as little as great King Cnut could stay the sea until it had reached the appointed place, so little can we raise a barrier to the wave of progress, and say, "Thus far and no further shalt thou come."

What then? This at least: if we live in an age of mechanism let us see to it that we are a race of intelligent mechanics; and if man is to be the Dæmon of a machine let him know the setting of the knives, the rise of the piston, the part that each wheel and rod plays in the economy of the whole, the part that he himself plays, co-operating with it. Then, when he has lived and served intelligently, let us give him of our flocks and of our floor that he may learn to rest in the lengthening shadows until he is called to his work above.

So I sat, hammering out my thoughts, and with them the conviction that stonebreaking should be allotted to minor poets or vagrant children of nature like myself, never to such tired folk as my poor mate at the cross-roads and his fellows.

At noon, when I stopped for my meal, the sun was baking the hard white road in a pitiless glare. Several waggons and carts passed, the horses sweating and straining, with drooping, fly-tormented ears. The men for the most part nodded slumberously on the shaft, seeking the little shelter the cart afforded; but one shuffled in the white dust, with an occasional chirrup and friendly pressure on the tired horse's neck.

Then an old woman and a small child appeared in sight, both with enormous sunbonnets and carrying baskets. As they came up with me the woman stopped and swept her face with her hand, while the child, depositing the basket in the dust with great care, wiped her little sticky fingers on her pinafore. Then the shady hedge beckoned them and they came and sat down near me. The woman looked

about seventy, tall, angular, dauntless, good for another ten years of hard work. The little maid—her only grandchild, she told me—was just four, her father away soldiering, and the mother died in childbed, so for four years the child had known no other guardian or playmate than the old woman. She was not the least shy, but had the strange self-possession which comes from associating with one who has travelled far on life's journey.

"I could n't leave her alone in the house," said her grandmother, "and she would n't leave the kitten for fear it should be lonesome" —with a humorous, tender glance at the child —"but it 's a long tramp in the heat for the little one, and we 've another mile to go."

"Will you let her bide here till you come back?" I said. "She 'll be all right by me."

The old lady hesitated.

"Will 'ee stay by him, dearie?" she said.

The small child nodded, drew from her miniature pocket a piece of sweetstuff, extracted from the basket a small black cat, and settled in for the afternoon. Her grand-

mother rose, took her basket, and, with a nod and "Thank 'ee kindly, mister," went off down the road.

I went back to my work a little depressed —why had I not white hair?—for a few minutes had shown me that I was not old enough for the child despite my forty years. She was quite happy with the little black cat, which lay in the small lap blinking its yellow eyes at the sun; and presently an old man came by, lame and bent, with gnarled twisted hands, leaning heavily on his stick.

He greeted me in a high, piping voice, limped across to the child, and sat down.

"Your little maid, mister?" he said.

I explained.

"Ah," he said, "I 've left a little darlin' like this at 'ome. It 's 'ard on us old folks when we 're one too many; but the little mouths must be filled, and my son, 'e said 'e did n't see they could keep me on the arf-crown, with another child on the way; so I 'm tramping to N——, to the House; but it 's a 'ard pinch, leavin' the little ones."

I looked at him—a typical countryman,

with white hair, mild blue eyes, and a rosy, childish, unwrinkled face.

"I 'm eighty-four," he went on, "and terrible bad with the rheumatics and my chest. Maybe it 'll not be long before the Lord remembers me."

The child crept close and put a sticky little hand confidingly into the tired old palm. The two looked strangely alike, for the world seems much the same to those who leave it behind as to those who have but taken the first step on its circular pathway.

"'Ook at my kitty," she said, pointing to the small creature in her lap. Then, as the old man touched it with trembling fingers she went on—"'Oo is n't my grandad; he 's away in the sky, but I 'll kiss 'oo."

I worked on, hearing at intervals the old piping voice and the child-treble, much of a note; and thinking of the blessings vouchsafed to the simple old age which crowns a harmless working-life spent in the fields. The two under the hedge had everything in common and were boundlessly content together, the sting of the knowledge of good

and evil past for the one, and for the other still to come; while I stood on the battlefield of the world, the flesh, and the devil, though, thank God, with my face to the foe.

The old man sat resting: I had promised him a lift with my friend the driver of the flour-cart, and he was almost due when the child's grandmother came down the road.

When she saw my other visitor she stood amazed.

"What, Richard Hunton, that worked with my old man years ago up at Ditton, whatever are you doin' all these miles from your own place?"

"Is it Eliza Jakes?"

He looked at her dazed, doubtful.

"An' who else should it be? Where 's your memory gone, Richard Hunton, and you not such a great age either? Where are you stayin'?"

Shame overcame him; his lips trembled, his mild blue eyes filled with tears. I told the tale as I had heard it, and Mrs. Jakes's indignation was good to see.

"Not keep you on 'alf a crown! Send you

to the House! May the Lord forgive them! You would n't eat no more than a fair-sized cat, and not long for this world either, that 's plain to see. No, Richard Hunton, you don't go to the House while I 'm above ground; it 'd make my good man turn to think of it. You 'll come 'ome with me and the little 'un there. I 've my washin', and a bit put by for a rainy day, and a bed to spare, and the Lord and the parson will see I don't come to want."

She stopped breathless, her defensive motherhood in arms.

The old man said quaveringly, in the pathetic, grudging phrase of the poor, which veils their gratitude while it testifies their independence, "Maybe I might as well." He rose with difficulty, picked up his bundle and stick, the small child replaced the kitten in its basket, and thrust her hand in her new friend's.

"Then 'oo *is* grandad tum back," she said.

Mrs. Jakes had been fumbling in her pocket, and extracted a penny, which she pressed on me.

"It 's little enough, mister," she said.

Then, as I tried to return it: "Nay, I 've enough, and yours is poor paid work."

I hope I shall always be able to keep that penny; and as I watched the three going down the dusty white road, with the child in the middle, I thanked God for the Brotherhood of the Poor.

IV

YESTERDAY a funeral passed, from the workhouse at N——, a quaint sepulture without solemnities. The rough, ungarnished coffin of stained deal lay bare and unsightly on the floor of an old market-cart; a woman sat beside, steadying it with her feet. The husband drove; and the most depressed of the three was the horse, a broken-kneed, flea-bitten grey. It was pathetic, this bringing home in death of the old father whom, while he lived, they had been too poor to house; it was at no small sacrifice that they had spared him that terror of old age, a pauper's grave, and brought him to lie by his wife in our quiet churchyard. They felt no emotion, this husband and wife, only a dull sense of filial duty done, respectability preserved; and above and through all, the bitter but necessary counting the cost of this last bed.

It is strange how pagan many of us are in our beliefs. True, the funeral libations have

made way for the comfortable bakemeats; still, to the large majority Death is Pluto, king of the dark Unknown whence no traveller returns, rather than Azrael, brother and friend, lord of this mansion of life. Strange how men shun him as he waits in the shadow, watching our puny straining after immortality, sending his comrade sleep to prepare us for himself. When the hour strikes he comes—very gently, very tenderly, if we will but have it so—folds the tired hands together, takes the way-worn feet in his broad strong palm; and lifting us in his wonderful arms he bears us swiftly down the valley and across the waters of Remembrance.

Very pleasant art thou, O Brother Death, thy love is wonderful, passing the love of women.

. . . . .

To-day I have lived in a whirl of dust. To-morrow is the great annual Cattle Fair at E——, and through the long hot hours the beasts from all the district round have streamed in broken procession along my road, to change hands or to die. Surely the lordship over

creation implies wise and gentle rule for intelligent use, not the pursuit of a mere immediate end, without any thought of community in the great sacrament of life.

For the most part mystery has ceased for this working Western world, and with it reverence. Coventry Patmore says: "God clothes Himself actually and literally with His whole creation. Herbs take up and assimilate minerals, beasts assimilate herbs, and God, in the Incarnation and its proper Sacrament, assimilates us, who, says St. Augustine, 'are God's beasts.'" It is man in his blind self-seeking who separates woof from weft in the living garment of God, and loses the more as he neglects the outward and visible signs of a world-wide grace.

In olden days the herd led his flock, going first in the post of danger to defend the creatures he had weaned from their natural habits for his various uses. Now that good relationship has ceased for us to exist, man drives the beast before him, means to his end, but with no harmony between end and means. All day long the droves of sheep pass me on

their lame and patient way, no longer freely and instinctively following a protector and forerunner, but *driven,* impelled by force and resistless will—the same will which once went before without force. They are all trimmed as much as possible to one pattern, and all make the same sad plaint. It is a day on which to thank God for the unknown tongue. The drover and his lad in dusty blue coats plod along stolidly, deaf and blind to all but the way before them; no longer wielding the crook, instrument of deliverance, or at most of gentle compulsion, but armed with a heavy stick and mechanically dealing blows on the short thick fleeces; without evil intent because without thought—it is the ritual of the trade.

Of all the poor dumb pilgrims of the road the bullocks are the most terrible to see. They are not patient, but go most unwillingly with lowered head and furtive sideways motion, in their eyes a horror of great fear. The sleek cattle, knee deep in pasture, massed at the gate, and stared mild-eyed and with inquiring bellow at the retreating drove; but

these passed without answer on to the Unknown, and for them it spelt death.

Behind a squadron of sleek, well-fed cart-horses, formed in fours, with straw braid in mane and tail, came the ponies, for the most part a merry company. Long strings of rusty, shaggy two-year-olds, unbroken, unkempt, the short Down grass still sweet on their tongues; full of fun, frolic, and wickedness, biting and pulling, casting longing eyes at the hedgerows. The boys appear to recognise them as kindred spirits, and are curiously forbearing and patient. Soon both ponies and boys vanish in a white whirl, and a long line of carts, which had evidently waited for the dust to subside, comes slowly up the incline. For the most part they carry the pigs and fowls, carriage folk of the road. The latter are hot, crowded, and dusty, under the open netting; the former for the most part cheerfully remonstrative.

I drew a breath of relief as the noise of wheels died away and my road sank into silence. The hedgerows are no longer green but white and choked with dust, a sight to

move good sister Rain to welcome tears. The birds seem to have fled before the noisy confusion. I wonder whether my snake has seen and smiled at the clumsy ruling of the lord he so little heeds? I turned aside through the gate to plunge face and hands into the cool of the sheltered grass that side the hedge, and then rested my eyes on the stretch of green I had lacked all day. The rabbits had apparently played and browsed unmindful of the stir, and were still flirting their white tails along the hedgerows; a lark rose, another and another, and I went back to my road. Peace still reigned, for the shadows were lengthening, and there would be little more traffic for the fair. I turned to my work, grateful for the stillness, and saw on the white stretch of road a lone old man and a pig. Surely I knew that tall figure in the quaint grey smock, surely I knew the face, furrowed like nature's face in springtime, and crowned by a round, soft hat? And the pig, the black pig walking decorously free? Ay, I knew them.

In the early spring I took a whole holiday and a long tramp; and towards afternoon,

tired and thirsty, sought water at a little lonely cottage whose windows peered and blinked under overhanging brows of thatch. I had, not the water I asked for, but milk and a bowl of sweet porridge for which I paid only thanks; and stayed for a chat with my kindly hosts. They were a quaint old couple of the kind rarely met with nowadays. They enjoyed a little pension from the Squire and a garden in which vegetables and flowers lived side by side in friendliest fashion. Bees worked and sang over the thyme and marjoram, blooming early in a sunny nook; and in a homely sty lived a solemn black pig, a pig with a history.

It was no common utilitarian pig, but the honoured guest of the old couple, and it knew it. A year before, their youngest and only surviving child, then a man of five-and-twenty, had brought his mother the result of his savings in the shape of a fine young pig: a week later he lay dead of the typhoid that scourged Maidstone. Hence the pig was sacred, cared for and loved by this Darby and Joan.

"Ee be mos' like a child to me and the

mother, an' mos' as sensible as a Christian, ee be," the old man had said; and I could hardly credit my eyes when I saw the tall bent figure side by side with the black pig, coming along my road on such a day.

I hailed the old man, and both turned aside; but he gazed at me without remembrance.

I spoke of the pig and its history. He nodded wearily. "Ay, ay, lad, you 've got it; 't is poor Dick's pig right enow."

"But you 're never going to take it to E——?"

"Ay, but I be, and comin' back alone, if the Lord be marciful. The missus has been terrible bad this two months and more; Squire 's in foreign parts; and food-stuffs such as the old woman wants is hard buying for poor folks. The stocking 's empty, now 't is the pig must go, and I believe he 'd be glad for to do the missus a turn; she were terrible good to him, were the missus, and fond, too. I durs n't tell her he was to go; she 'd sooner starve than lose poor Dick's pig. Well, we 'd best be movin'; 't is a fairish step."

The pig followed comprehending and docile, and as the quaint couple passed from sight I thought I heard Brother Death stir in the shadow. He is a strong angel and of great pity.

V

THERE is always a little fire of wood on the open hearth in the kitchen when I get home at night; the old lady says it is "company" for her, and sits in the lonely twilight, her knotted hands lying quiet on her lap, her listening eyes fixed on the burning sticks.

I wonder sometimes whether she hears music in the leap and lick of the fiery tongues, music such as he of Bayreuth draws from the violins till the hot energy of the fire spirit is on us, embodied in sound.

Surely she hears some voice, that lonely old woman on whom is set the seal of great silence?

It is a great truth tenderly said that God builds the nest for the blind bird; and may it not be that He opens closed eyes and unstops deaf ears to sights and sounds from which others by these very senses are debarred?

Here the best of us see through a mist of tears men as trees walking; it is only in the

land which is very far off and yet very near that we shall have fulness of sight and see the King in His beauty; and I cannot think that any listening ears listen in vain.

The coppice at our back is full of birds, for is is far from the road and they nest there undisturbed year after year. Through the still night I heard the nightingales calling, calling, until I could bear it no longer and went softly out into the luminous dark.

The little wood was manifold with sound, I heard my little brothers who move by night rustling in grass and tree. A hedgehog crossed my path with a dull squeak, the bats shrilled high to the stars, a white owl swept past me crying his hunting note, a beetle boomed suddenly in my face; and above and through it all the nightingales sang and sang!

The night wind bent the listening trees, and the stars yearned earthward to hear the song of deathless love. Louder and louder the wonderful notes rose and fell in a passion of melody; and then sank to rest on that low thrilling call which it is said Death once heard, and stayed his hand.

They will scarcely sing again this year, these nightingales, for they are late on the wing as it is. It seems as if on such nights they sang as the swan sings, knowing it to be the last time—with the lavish note of one who bids an eternal farewell.

At last there was silence. Sitting under the big beech tree, the giant of the coppice, I rested my tired self in the lap of mother earth, breathed of her breath and listened to her voice in the quickening silence until my flesh came again as the flesh of a little child, for it is true recreation to sit at the footstool of God wrapped in a fold of His living robe, the while night smooths our tired face with her healing hands.

The grey dawn awoke and stole with trailing robes across earth's floor. At her footsteps the birds roused from sleep and cried a greeting; the sky flushed and paled conscious of coming splendour; and overhead a file of swans passed with broad strong flight to the reeded waters of the sequestered pool.

Another hour of silence while the light throbbed and flamed in the east; then the

larks rose harmonious from a neighbouring field, the rabbits scurried with ears alert to their morning meal, the day had begun.

I passed through the coppice and out into the fields beyond. The dew lay heavy on leaf and blade and gossamer, a cool fresh wind swept clear over dale and down from the sea, and the clover field rippled like a silvery lake in the breeze.

There is something inexpressibly beautiful in the unused day, something beautiful in the fact that it is still untouched, unsoiled; and town and country share alike in this loveliness. At half-past three on a June morning even London has not assumed her responsibilities, but smiles and glows lighthearted and smokeless under the caresses of the morning sun.

Five o'clock. The bell rings out crisp and clear from the monastery where the Bedesmen of St. Hugh watch and pray for the souls on this labouring forgetful earth. Every hour the note of comfort and warning cries across the land, tells the Sanctus, the Angelus, and the Hours of the Passion, and calls to remembrance and prayer.

When the wind is north, the sound carries as far as my road, and companies me through the day; and if to His dumb children God in His mercy reckons work as prayer, most certainly those who have forged through the ages an unbroken chain of supplication and thanksgiving will be counted among the stalwart labourers of the house of the Lord.

Sun and bell together are my only clock: it is time for my water drawing; and gathering a pile of mushrooms, children of the night, I hasten home.

The cottage is dear to me in its quaint untidiness and want of rectitude, dear because we are to be its last denizens, last of the long line of toilers who have sweated and sown that others might reap, and have passed away leaving no trace.

I once saw a tall cross in a seaboard churchyard, inscribed, "To the memory of the unknown dead who have perished in these waters." There might be one in every village sleeping-place to the unhonoured many who made fruitful the land with sweat and tears. It is a consolation to think that when we look

back on this stretch of life's road from beyond the first milestone, which, it is instructive to remember, is always a grave, we may hope to see the work of this world with open eyes, and to judge of it with a due sense of proportion.

A bee with laden honey-bag hummed and buzzed in the hedge as I got ready for work, importuning the flowers for that which he could not carry, and finally giving up the attempt in despair fell asleep on a buttercup, the best place for his weary little velvet body. In five minutes—they may have been five hours to him—he awoke a new bee, sensible and clear-sighted, and flew blithely away to the hive with his sufficiency—an example this weary world would be wise to follow.

My road has been lonely to-day. A parson came by in the afternoon, a stranger in the neighbourhood, for he asked his way. He talked awhile, and with kindly rebuke said it was sad to see a man of my education brought so low, which shows how the outside appearance may mislead the prejudiced observer. "Was it misfortune?" "Nay, the best of good luck," I answered, gaily.

The good man with beautiful readiness sat down on a heap of stones and bade me say on. "Read me a sermon in stone," he said, simply; and I stayed my hand to read.

He listened with courteous intelligence.

"You hold a roadmender has a vocation?" he asked.

"As the monk or the artist, for, like both, he is universal. The world is his home; he serves all men alike, ay, and for him the beasts have equal honour with the men. His soul is 'bound up in the bundle of life' with all other souls, he sees his father, his mother, his brethren in the children of the road. For him there is nothing unclean, nothing common; the very stones cry out that they serve."

Parson nodded his head.

"It is all true," he said; "beautifully true. But need such a view of life necessitate the work of roadmending? Surely all men should be roadmenders."

O wise parson, so to read the lesson of the road!

"It is true," I answered; "but some of us find our salvation in the actual work, and earn

our bread better in this than in any other way. No man is dependent on our earning, all men on our work. We are 'rich beyond the dreams of avarice' because we have all that we need, and yet we taste the life and poverty of the very poor. We are, if you will, uncloistered monks, preaching friars who speak not with the tongue, disciples who hear the wise words of a silent master."

"Robert Louis Stevenson was a roadmender," said the wise parson.

"Ay, and with more than his pen," I answered. "I wonder was he ever so truly great, so entirely the man we know and love, as when he inspired the chiefs to make a highway in the wilderness. Surely no more fitting monument could exist to his memory than the Road of Gratitude, cut, laid, and kept by the pure-blooded tribe kings of Samoa."

Parson nodded.

He knew that the people who make no roads are ruled out from intelligent participation in the world's brotherhood. He filled his pipe, thinking the while, then he held out his pouch to me.

"Try some of this baccy," he said; "Sherwood of Magdalen sent it me from some outlandish place."

I accepted gratefully. It was such tobacco as falls to the lot of few roadmenders.

He rose to go.

"I wish I could come and break stones," he said, a little wistfully.

"Nay," said I, "few men have such weary roadmending as yours, and perhaps you need my road less than most men, and less than most parsons."

We shook hands, and he went down the road and out of my life.

He little guessed that I knew Sherwood, ay, and knew him too, for had not Sherwood told me of the man he delighted to honour?

Ah, well! I am no Browning Junior, and Sherwood's name is not Sherwood.

VI

AWHILE ago I took a holiday; mouched, played truant from my road. Jem the waggoner hailed me as he passed—he was going to the mill—would I ride with him and come back atop of the full sacks?

I hid my hammer in the hedge, climbed into the great waggon white and fragrant with the clean sweet meal, and flung myself down on the empty flour bags. The looped-back tarpaulin framed the long vista of my road with the downs beyond; and I lay in the cool dark, caressed by the fresh breeze in its thoroughfare, soothed by the strong monotonous tramp of the great grey team and the music of the jangling harness.

Jem walked at the leaders' heads; it is his rule when the waggon is empty, a rule no "company" will make him break. At first I regretted it, but soon discovered I learnt to know him better so, as he plodded along, his thickset figure slightly bent, his hands in his

pockets, his whip under one arm, whistling hymn tunes in a low minor, while the great horses answered to his voice without touch of lash or guiding rein.

I lay as in a blissful dream and watched my road unfold. The sun set the pine-boles aflare where the hedge is sparse, and stretched the long shadows of the besom poplars in slanting bars across the white highway; the roadside gardens smiled friendly with their trim-cut laurels and rows of stately sunflowers—a seemly proximity this, Daphne and Clytie, sisters in experience, wrapped in the warm caress of the god whose wooing they need no longer fear. Here and there we passed little groups of women and children off to work in the early cornfields, and Jem paused in his fond repetition of "The Lord my pasture shall prepare" to give them good-day.

It is like Life, this travelling backwards—that which has been, alone visible—like Life, which is after all retrospective, with a steady moving on into the Unknown, Unseen, until Faith is lost in Sight and experience is no longer the touchstone of humanity. The

face of the son of Adam is set on the road his brothers have travelled, marking their landmarks, tracing their journeyings; but with the eyes of a child of God he looks forward straining to catch a glimpse of the jewelled walls of the future home, the city " Eternal in the Heavens."

Presently we left my road for the deep shade of a narrow country way where the great oaks and beeches meet overhead and no hedge-clipper sets his hand to stay nature's profusion; and so by pleasant lanes scarce the waggon's width across, now shady, now sunny, here bordered by thick-set coverts, there giving on fruitful fields, we came at length to the mill.

I left Jem to his business with the miller and wandered down the flowery meadow to listen to the merry clack of the stream and the voice of the waters on the weir. The great wheel was at rest, as I love best to see it in the late afternoon; the splash and churn of the water belong rather to the morning hours. It is the chief mistake we make in portioning out our day that we banish rest to the night-time, which is for sleep and recreating, in-

stead of setting apart the later afternoon and quiet twilight hours for the stretching of weary limbs and repose of tired mind after a day's toil that should begin and end at five.

The little stone bridge over the mill-stream is almost on a level with the clear running water, and I lay there and gazed at the huge wheel which, under multitudinous forms and uses, is one of the world's wonders, because one of the few things we imitative children have not learnt from nature. Is it perchance a memory out of that past when Adam walked clear-eyed in Paradise and talked with the Lord in the cool of the day? Did he see then the flaming wheels instinct with service, wondrous messengers of the Most High vouchsafed in vision to the later prophets?

Maybe he did, and going forth from before the avenging sword of his own forging to the bitterness of an accursed earth, took with him this bright memory of perfect, ceaseless service, and so fashioned our labouring wheel—pathetic link with the time of his innocency. It is one of many unanswered questions, good to ask because it has no answer, only the sug-

gestion of a train of thought: perhaps we are never so receptive as when with folded hands we say simply, "This is a great mystery." I watched and wondered until Jem called, and I had to leave the rippling weir and the water's side, and the wheel with its untold secret.

The miller's wife gave me tea and a crust of home-made bread, and the miller's little maid sat on my knee while I told the sad tale of a little pink cloud separated from its parents and teased and hunted by mischievous little airs. To-morrow, if I mistake not, her garden will be wet with its tears, and, let us hope, point a moral; for the tale had its origin in a frenzied chicken driven from the side of an anxious mother, and pursued by a sturdy, relentless figure in a white sun-bonnet.

The little maid trotted off, greatly sobered, to look somewhat prematurely for the cloud's tears; and I climbed to my place at the top of the piled-up sacks, and thence watched twilight pass to starlight through my narrow peep, and, so watching, slept until Jem's voice hailed me from Dreamland, and I went, only half awake, across the dark fields home.

Autumn is here and it is already late. He has painted the hedges russet and gold, scarlet and black, and a tangle of grey; now he has damp brown leaves in his hair and frost in his finger-tips.

It is a season of contrasts; at first all is stir and bustle, the ingathering of man and beast; barn and rickyard stand filled with golden treasure; at the farm the sound of threshing; in wood and copse the squirrels busied 'twixt tree and storehouse, while the ripe nuts fall with thud of thunder rain. When the harvesting is over, the fruit gathered, the last rick thatched, there comes a pause. Earth strips off her bright colours and shows a bare and furrowed face; the dead leaves fall gently and sadly through the calm, sweet air; grey mists drape the fields and hedges. The migratory birds have left, save a few late swallows; and as I sit at work in the soft, still rain, I can hear the blackbird's melancholy trill and the thin pipe of the redbreast's winter song—the air is full of the sound of farewell.

Forethought and preparation for the Future which shall be; farewell, because of the

Future which may never be—for us; "Man, thou hast goods laid up for many years, and it is well; but, remember, this night *thy* soul may be required"; is the unvoiced lesson of autumn. There is growing up among us a great fear; it stares at us white, wide-eyed, from the faces of men and women alike—the fear of pain, mental and bodily pain. For the last twenty years we have waged war with suffering—a noble war when fought in the interest of the many, but fraught with great danger to each individual man. It is the fear which should not be, rather than the "hope which is in us," that leads men in these days to drape Death in a flowery mantle, to lay stress on the shortness of parting, the speedy reunion, to postpone their good-byes until the last moment, or avoid saying them altogether; and this fear is a poor, ignoble thing, unworthy of those who are as gods, knowing good and evil. We are still paying the price of that knowledge; suffering in both kinds is a substantial part of it, and brings its own healing. Let us pay like men, our face to the open heaven, neither whimpering like children in

the dark, nor lulled to unnecessary oblivion by some lethal drug; for it is manly, not morbid, to dare to taste the pungent savour of pain, the lingering sadness of farewell which emphasises the aftermath of life; it should have its place in all our preparation as a part of our inheritance we dare not be without.

There is an old couple in our village who are past work. The married daughter has made shift to take her mother and the parish half-crown, but there is neither room nor food for the father, and he must go to N——. If husband and wife went together, they would be separated at the workhouse door. The parting had to come; it came yesterday. I saw them stumbling lamely down the road on their last journey together, walking side by side without touch or speech, seeing and heeding nothing but a blank future. As they passed me the old man said gruffly, " 'T is far eno'; better be gettin' back "; but the woman shook her head, and they breasted the hill together. At the top they paused, shook hands, and separated; one went on, the other turned back; and as the old woman limped

blindly by I turned away, for there are sights a man dare not look upon. She passed; and I heard a child's shrill voice say, "I come to look for you, gran"; and I thanked God that there need be no utter loneliness in the world while it holds a little child.

Now it is my turn, and I must leave the wayside to serve in the sheepfolds during the winter months. It is scarcely a farewell, for my road is ubiquitous, eternal; there are green ways in Paradise and golden streets in the beautiful City of God. Nevertheless, my heart is heavy; for, viewed by the light of the waning year, roadmending seems a great and wonderful work which I have poorly conceived of and meanly performed: yet I have learnt to understand dimly the truths of three great paradoxes—the blessing of a curse, the voice of silence, the companionship of solitude —and so take my leave of this stretch of road, and of you who have fared along the white highway through the medium of a printed page.

Farewell! It is a roadmender's word; I cry you Godspeed to the next milestone—and beyond.

OUT OF THE SHADOW

I

I AM no longer a roadmender; the stretch of white highway which leads to the end of the world will know me no more; the fields and hedgerows, grass and leaf stiff with the crisp rime of winter's breath, lie beyond my horizon; the ewes in the folding, their mysterious eyes quick with the consciousness of coming motherhood, answer another's voice and hand; while I lie here, not in the lonely companionship of my expectations, but where the shadow is bright with kindly faces and gentle hands, until one kinder and gentler still carries me down the stairway into the larger room.

But now the veil was held aside and one went by crowned with the majesty of years, wearing the ermine of an unstained rule, the purple of her people's loyalty. Nations stood with bated breath to see her pass in the starlit mist of her children's tears; a monarch—greatest of her time; an empress—conquered men called mother; a woman—Englishmen

cried queen; still the crowned captive of her people's heart—the prisoner of love.

The night-goers passed under my window in silence, neither song nor shout broke the welcome dark; next morning the workmen who went by were strangely quiet.

"VICTORIA DEI GRATIA BRITANNIARUM REGINA."

Did they think of how that legend would disappear, and of all it meant, as they paid their pennies at the coffee-stall? The feet rarely know the true value and work of the head; but all Englishmen have been and will be quick to acknowledge and revere Victoria by the grace of God a wise woman, a great and loving mother.

Years ago, I, standing at a level crossing, saw her pass. The train slowed down, and she caught sight of the gatekeeper's little girl who had climbed the barrier. Such a smile as she gave her! And then I caught a quick startled gesture as she slipped from my vision; I thought afterwards it was that she feared the child might fall. Mother first, then Queen;

even so rest came to her—not in one of the royal palaces, but in her own home, surrounded by the immediate circle of her nearest and dearest, while the world kept watch and ward.

I, a shy lover of the fields and woods, longed always, should a painless passing be vouchsafed me, to make my bed on the fragrant pine needles in the aloneness of a great forest; to lie once again as I had lain many a time, bathed in the bitter sweetness of the sun-blessed pines, lapped in the manifold silence; my ear attuned to the wind of Heaven with its call from the Cities of Peace. In sterner mood, when Love's hand held a scourge, I craved rather the stress of the moorland with its bleaker mind imperative of sacrifice. To rest again under the lee of Rippon Tor swept by the strong peat-smelling breeze; to stare untired at the long cloud-shadowed reaches, and watch the mist-wraiths huddle and shrink round the stones of blood; until my sacrifice too was accomplished, and my soul had fled. A wild waste moor; a vast void sky; and naught between heaven and earth but man,

his sin-glazed eyes seeking afar the distant light of his own heart.

With years came counsels more profound, and the knowledge that man was no mere dweller in the woods to follow the footsteps of the piping god, but an integral part of an organised whole, in which Pan too has his fulfilment. The wise Venetians knew; and read pantheism into Christianity when they set these words round Ezekiel's living creatures in the altar vault of St. Mark's:—

QUÆQUE SUB OBSCURIS DE CRISTO DICTA FIGURIS
HIS APERIRE DATUR ET IN HIS, DEUS IPSE NOTATUR.

"Thou shalt have none other gods but me." If man had been able to keep this one commandment perfectly the other nine would never have been written; instead he has comprehensively disregarded it, and perhaps never more than now in the twentieth century. Ah, well! this world, in spite of all its sinning, is still the Garden of Eden where the Lord walked with man, not in the cool of evening, but in the heat and stress of the immediate working day. There is no angel now with

flaming sword to keep the way of the Tree of Life, but tapers alight morning by morning in the Hostel of God to point us to it; and we who are as gods knowing good and evil, partake of that fruit " whereof whoso eateth shall never die"; the greatest gift or the most awful penalty—Eternal Life.

I then, with my craving for tree and sky, held that a great capital with its stir of life and death, of toil and strife and pleasure, was an ill place for a sick man to wait in; a place to shrink from as a child shrinks from the rude blow of one out of authority. Yet here, far from moor and forest, hillside and hedgerow, in the family sitting-room of the English-speaking peoples, the London much misunderstood, I find the fulfilment by antithesis of all desire. For the loneliness of the moorland, there is the warmth and companionship of London's swift beating heart. For silence there is sound—the sound and stir of service—for the most part far in excess of its earthly equivalent. Against the fragrant incense of the pines I set the honest sweat of the man whose lifetime is the measure of his working

day. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?" wrote Blessed John, who himself loved so much that he beheld the Lamb as it had been slain from the beginning when Adam fell, and the City of God with light most precious. The burden of corporate sin, the sword of corporate sorrow, the joy of corporate righteousness; thus we become citizens in the Kingdom of God, and companions of all his creatures. "It is not good that man should be alone," said the Lord God.

I live now as it were in two worlds, the world of sight, and the world of sound; and they scarcely ever touch each other. I hear the grind of heavy traffic, the struggle of horses on the frost-breathed ground, the decorous jolt of omnibuses, the jangle of cab bells, the sharp warning of bicycles at the corner, the swift rattle of costers' carts as they go south at night with their shouting, goading crew. All these things I hear, and more; but I see no road, only the silent river of my heart with its tale of wonder and years, and the white beat of seagulls' wings in strong inquiring flight.

Sometimes there is naught to see on the waterway but a solitary black hull, a very Stygian ferry-boat, manned by a solitary figure, and moving slowly up under the impulse of the far-reaching sweeps. Then the great barges pass with their coffined treasure, drawn by a small self-righteous steam-tug. Later, lightened of their load, and waiting on wind and tide, I see them swooping by like birds set free; tawny sails that mind me of red-roofed Whitby with its northern fleet; black sails as of some heedless Theseus; white sails that sweep out of the morning mist " like restless gossameres." They make the bridge, which is just within my vision, and then away past Westminster and Blackfriars where St. Paul's great dome lifts the cross high over a self-seeking city; past Southwark where England's poet illuminated the scroll of divine wisdom at the sign of the Tabard; past the Tower with its haunting ghosts of history; past Greenwich, fairy city, caught in the meshes of riverside mist; and then the salt and speer of the sea, the companying with great ships, the fresh burden.

At night I see them again, silent, mysterious; searching the darkness with unwinking yellow stare, led by a great green light. They creep up under the bridge which spans the river with its watching eyes, and vanish, crying back a warning note as they make the upper reach, or strident hail, as a chain of kindred phantoms passes, ploughing a contrary tide.

Throughout the long watches of the night I follow them; and in the early morning they slide by, their eyes pale in the twilight; while the stars flicker and fade and the gas lamps die down into a dull yellow blotch against the glory and glow of a new day.

II

FEBRUARY is here, February fill-dyke; the month of purification, of cleansing rains and pulsing bounding streams, and white mist clinging insistent to field and hedgerow so that when her veil is withdrawn greenness may make us glad.

The river has been uniformly grey of late, with no wind to ruffle its surface or to speed the barges dropping slowly and sullenly down with the tide through a blurring haze. I watched one yesterday, its useless sails half-furled and no sign of life save the man at the helm. It drifted stealthily past, and a little behind, flying low, came a solitary seagull, grey as the river's haze—a following bird.

Once again I lay on my back in the bottom of the tarry old fishing smack, blue sky above and no sound but the knock, knock of the waves, and the thud and curl of falling foam as the old boat's blunt nose breasted the coming sea. Then Daddy Whiddon spoke.

"A follerin' bürrd," he said.

I got up, and looked across the blue field we were ploughing into white furrows. Far away a tiny sail scarred the great solitude, and astern came a gull flying slowly close to the water's breast.

Daddy Whiddon waved his pipe towards it.

"A follerin' bürrd," he said, again; and again I waited; questions were not grateful to him.

"There be a carpse there, sure enough, a carpse driftin' and shiftin' on the floor of the sea. There be those as can't rest, poor sawls, and her 'll be mun, her 'll be mun, and the sperrit of her is with the bürrd."

The clumsy boom swung across as we changed our course, and the water ran from us in smooth reaches on either side: the bird flew steadily on.

"What will the spirit do?" I said.

The old man looked at me gravely.

"Her 'll rest in the Lard's time, in the Lard's gude time—but now her 'll just be follerin' on with the bürrd."

The gull was flying close to us now, and a

cold wind swept the sunny sea. I shivered: Daddy looked at me curiously.

"There be reason enough to be cawld if us did but knaw it, but I be mos' used to 'em, poor sawls." He shaded his keen old blue eyes, and looked away across the water. His face kindled. "There be a skule comin', and by my sawl 't is mackerel they be drivin'."

I watched eagerly, and saw the dark line rise and fall in the trough of the sea, and, away behind, the stir and rush of tumbling porpoises as they chased their prey.

Again we changed our tack, and each taking an oar, pulled lustily for the beach.

"Please God her 'll break inshore," said Daddy Whiddon; and he shouted the news to the idle waiting men who hailed us.

In a moment all was stir, for the fishing had been slack. Two boats put out with the lithe brown seine. The dark line had turned, but the school was still behind, churning the water in clumsy haste; they were coming in.

Then the brit broke in silvery leaping waves on the shelving beach. The three-fold hunt was over; the porpoises turned out to sea in

search of fresh quarry; and the seine, dragged by ready hands, came slowly, stubbornly in with its quivering treasure of fish. They had sought a haven and found none; the brit lay dying in flickering iridescent heaps as the bare-legged babies of the village gathered them up; and far away over the water I saw a single grey speck; it was the following bird.

The curtain of river haze falls back; barge and bird are alike gone, and the lamplighter has lit the first gas-lamp on the far side of the bridge. Every night I watch him come, his progress marked by the great yellow eyes that wake the dark. Sometimes he walks quickly, sometimes he loiters on the bridge to chat, or stare at the dark water; but he always comes, leaving his watchful deterrent train behind him to police the night.

Once Demeter in the black anguish of her desolation searched for lost Persephone by the light of Hecate's torch; and searching all in vain, spurned beneath her empty feet an earth barren of her smile; froze with set brows the merry brooks and streams; and smote forest,

and plain, and fruitful field, with the breath of her last despair, until even Iambe's laughing jest was still. And then when the desolation was complete, across the wasted valley where the starveling cattle scarcely longed to browse, came the dreadful chariot—and Persephone. The day of the prisoner of Hades had dawned; and as the sun flamed slowly up to light her thwarted eyes the world sprang into blossom at her feet.

We can never be too Pagan when we are truly Christian, and the old myths are eternal truths held fast in the Church's net. Prometheus fetched fire from Heaven, to be slain forever in the fetching; and lo, a Greater than Prometheus came to fire the cresset of the Cross. Demeter waits now patiently enough. Persephone waits, too, in the faith of the sun she cannot see: and every lamp lit carries on the crusade which has for its goal a sunless, moonless, city whose light is the Light of the world.

"Lume è lassù, che visibile face
lo creatore a quella creatura,
che solo in lui vedere ha la sua pace."

Immediately outside my window is a lime tree—a little black skeleton of abundant branches—in which sparrows congregate to chirp and bicker. Farther away I have a glimpse of graceful planes, children of moonlight and mist; their dainty robes, still more or less unsullied, gleam ghostly in the gaslight athwart the dark. They make a brave show even in winter with their feathery branches and swinging tassels, whereas my little tree stands stark and uncompromising, with its horde of sooty sparrows cockney to the last tail feather, and a pathetic inability to look anything but black. Rain comes with strong caressing fingers, and the branches seem no whit the cleaner for her care; but then their glistening blackness mirrors back the succeeding sunlight, as a muddy pavement will sometimes lap our feet in a sea of gold. The little wet sparrows are for the moment equally transformed, for the sun turns their dun-colored coats to a ruddy bronze, and cries Chrysostom as it kisses each shiny beak. They are dumb Chrysostoms; but they preach a golden gospel, for the sparrows are to

London what the rainbow was to eight saved souls out of a waste of waters—a perpetual sign of the remembering mercies of God.

Last night there was a sudden clatter of hoofs, a shout, and then silence. A runaway cab-horse, a dark night, a wide crossing, and a heavy burden: so death came to a poor woman. People from the house went out to help; and I heard of her, the centre of an unknowing curious crowd, as she lay bonnetless in the mud of the road, her head on the kerb. A rude but painless death; the misery lay in her life; for this woman—worn, white-haired and wrinkled—had but fifty years to set against such a condition. The policeman reported her respectable, hardworking, living apart from her husband with a sister; but although they shared rooms, they "did not speak," and the sister refused all responsibility; so the parish must bury the dead woman, and thus ends an uneventful tragedy.

Was it her own fault? If so the greater pathos. The lonely souls that hold out timid hands to an unheeding world have their meed of interior comfort even here, while the sons

of consolation wait on the threshold for their footfall: but God help the soul that bars its own door! It is kicking against the pricks of Divine ordinance, the ordinance of a triune God; whether it be the dweller in crowded street or tenement who is proud to say, "I keep myself to myself," or Seneca writing in pitiful complacency, "Whenever I have gone among men, I have returned home less of a man." Whatever the next world holds in store, we are bidden in this to seek and serve God in our fellow-men, and in the creatures of His making whom He calls by name.

It was once my privilege to know an old organ-grinder named Gawdine. He was a hard swearer, a hard drinker, a hard liver, and he fortified himself body and soul against the world: he even drank alone, which is an evil sign.

One day to Gawdine sober came a little dirty child, who clung to his empty trouser leg—he had lost a limb years before—with a persistent unintelligible request. He shook the little chap off with a blow and a curse; and the child was trotting dismally away, when it sud-

denly turned, ran back, and held up a dirty face for a kiss.

Two days later Gawdine fell under a passing dray which inflicted terrible internal injuries on him. They patched him up in hospital, and he went back to his organ-grinding, taking with him two friends — a pain which fell suddenly upon him to rack and rend with an anguish of crucifixion, and the memory of a child's upturned face. Outwardly he was the same save that he changed the tunes of his organ, out of long-hoarded savings, for the jigs and reels which children hold dear, and stood patiently playing them in child-crowded alleys, where pennies are not as plentiful as elsewhere.

He continued to drink; it did not come within his new code to stop, since he could "carry his liquor well"; but he rarely, if ever, swore. He told me this tale through the throes of his anguish as he lay crouched on a mattress on the floor; and as the grip of the pain took him he tore and bit at his hands until they were maimed and bleeding, to keep the ready curses off his lips.

He told the story, but he gave no reason, offered no explanation: he has been dead now many a year, and thus would I write his epitaph:—

He saw the face of a little child and looked on God.

III

"TWO began, in a low voice, 'Why, the fact is, you see, Miss, this here ought to have been a *red* rose-tree, and we put a white one in by mistake.'"

As I look round this room I feel sure Two, and Five, and Seven, have all been at work on it, and made no mistakes, for round the walls runs a frieze of squat standard rose-trees, red as red can be, and just like those that Alice saw in the Queen's garden. In between them are Chaucer's name-children, prim little daisies, peering wideawake from green grass. This same grass has a history which I have heard. In the original stencil for the frieze it was purely conventional like the rest, and met in spikey curves round each tree; the painter, however, who was doing the work, was a lover of the fields; and feeling that such grass was a travesty, he added on his own account dainty little tussocks, and softened the hard line into a tufted carpet, the

grass growing irregularly, bent at will by the wind.

The result from the standpoint of conventional art is indeed disastrous; but my sympathy and gratitude are with the painter. I see, as he saw, the far-reaching robe of living ineffable green, of whose brilliance the eye never has too much, and in whose weft no two threads are alike; and shrink as he did from the conventionalising of that wind-swept glory.

The sea has its crested waves of recognisable form; the river its eddy and swirl and separate vortices; but the grass! The wind bloweth where it listeth and the grass bows as the wind blows—" thou canst not tell whither it goeth." It takes no pattern, it obeys no recognised law; it is like a beautiful creature of a thousand wayward moods, and its voice is like nothing else in the wide world. It bids you rest and bury your tired face in the green coolness, and breathe of its breath and of the breath of the good earth from which man was taken and to which he will one day return. Then, if you lend your ear and are silent

minded, you may hear wondrous things of the deep places of the earth; of life in mineral and stone as well as in pulsing sap; of a green world as the stars saw it before man trod it under foot—of the emerald which has its place with the rest in the City of God.

"What if earth
Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein,
Each to each other like, more than on earth is thought?"

It is a natural part of civilisation's lust of rearrangement that we should be so ready to conventionalise the beauty of this world into decorative patterns for our pilgrim tents. It is a phase, and will melt into other phases; but it tends to the increase of artificiality, and exists not only in art, but in everything. It is no new thing for jaded sentiment to crave the spur of the unnatural, to prefer the clever imitation, to live in a Devachan where the surroundings appear that which we would have them to be; but it is an interesting record of the pulse of the present day that "An Englishwoman's Love Letters" should have taken society by storm in the way it certainly has.

It is a delightful book to leave about, with its vellum binding, dainty ribbons, and the hallmark of a great publisher's name. But when we seek within we find love with its thousand voices and wayward moods, its shy graces and seemly reticences, love which has its throne and robe of state as well as the garment of the beggar maid, love which *is* before time was, which knew the world when the stars took up their courses, presented to us in gushing outpourings, the appropriate language of a woman's heart to the boor she delights to honour.

"It is woman who is the glory of man," says the author of "The House of Wisdom and Love," "*Regina mundi*, greater, because so far the less; and man is her head, but only as he serves his queen." Set this sober aphorism against the school girl love-making which kisses a man's feet and gaily refuses him the barren honour of having loved her first.

There is scant need for the apologia which precedes the letters; a few pages dispel the fear that we are prying into another's soul. As for the authorship, there is a woman's in-

fluence, an artist's poorly concealed bias in the foreign letters; and for the rest a man's blunders—so much easier to see in another than to avoid oneself—writ large from cover to cover. King Cophetua, who sends his "profoundly grateful remembrances," has most surely written the letters he would wish to receive.

"Mrs. Meynell!" cries one reviewer, triumphantly. Nay, the saints be good to us, what has Mrs. Meynell in common with the "Englishwoman's" language, style, or most unconvincing passion? Men can write as from a woman's heart when they are minded to do so in desperate earnestness—there is Clarissa Harlowe and Stevenson's Kirstie, and many more to prove it; but when a man writes as the author of the "Love Letters" writes, I feel, as did the painter of the frieze, that pattern-making has gone too far and included that which, like the grass, should be spared such a convention.

"I quite agree with you," said the Duchess, "and the moral of that is—'Be what you would seem to be'—or, if you 'd like to put it more simply—'never imagine yourself not

to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.' " And so by way of the Queen's garden I come back to my room again.

My heart's affections are still centred on my old attic, with boarded floor and whitewashed walls, where the sun blazoned a frieze of red and gold until he travelled too far towards the north, the moon streamed in to paint the trees in inky wavering shadows, and the stars flashed their glory to me across the years. But now sun and moon greet me only indirectly, and under the red roses hang pictures, some of them the dear companions of my days. Opposite me is the Arundel print of the Presentation, painted by the gentle " Brother of the Angels." Priest Simeon, a stately figure in green and gold, great with prophecy, gazes adoringly at the Bambino he holds with fatherly care. Our Lady, in robe of red and veil of shadowed purple, is instinct with light despite the sombre colouring, as she stretches out hungering, awe-struck hands for

her soul's delight. St. Joseph, dignified guardian and servitor, stands behind, holding the Sacrifice of the Poor to redeem the First-begotten.

St. Peter Martyr and the Dominican nun, gazing in rapt contemplation at the scene, are not one whit surprised to find themselves in the presence of eternal mysteries. In the Entombment, which hangs on the opposite wall, St. Dominic comes round the corner full of grievous amaze and tenderest sympathy, but with no sense of shock or intrusion, for was he not "famigliar di Cristo"? And so he takes it all in; the stone bed empty and waiting; the Beloved cradled for the last time on His mother's knees to be washed, lapped round, and laid to rest as if He were again the Babe of Bethlehem. He sees the Magdalen anointing the Sacred Feet; Blessed John caring for the living and the Dead; and he, Dominic—hound of the Lord—having his real, living share in the anguish and hope, the bedding of the dearest Dead, who did but leave this earth that He might manifest Himself more completely.

Underneath, with a leap across the centuries, is Rossetti's picture; Dante this time the onlooker, Beatrice, in her pale beauty, the death-kissed one. The same idea under different representations; the one conceived in childlike simplicity, the other recalling, even in the photograph, its wealth of colour and imagining; the one a world-wide ideal, the other an individual expression of it.

Beatrice was to Dante the inclusion of belief. She was more to him than he himself knew, far more to him after her death than before. And, therefore, the analogy between the pictures has at core a common reality. "It is expedient for you that I go away," is constantly being said to us as we cling earth-like to the outward expression, rather than to the inward manifestation—and blessed are those who hear and understand, for it is spoken only to such as have been with Him from the beginning. The eternal mysteries come into time for us individually under widely differing forms. The tiny child mothers its doll, croons to it, spends herself upon it, why she cannot tell you; and we who are here

in our extreme youth, never to be men and women grown in this world, nurse our ideal, exchange it, refashion it, call it by many names; and at last in here or hereafter we find in its naked truth the Child in the manger, even as the Wise Men found Him when they came from the East to seek a great King. There is but one necessary condition of this finding; we must follow the particular manifestation of light given us, never resting until it rests—over the place of the Child. And there is but one insurmountable hindrance, the extinction of or drawing back from the light truly apprehended by us. We forget this, and judge other men by the light of our own soul.

I think the old bishop must have understood it. He is my friend of friends as he lies opposite my window in his alabaster sleep, clad in pontifical robes, with unshod feet, a little island of white peace in a many-coloured marble sea. The faithful sculptor has given every line and wrinkle, the heavy eyelids and sunken face of tired old age, but withal the smile of a contented child.

I do not even know my bishop's name, only that the work is of the thirteenth century; but he is good to company with through the day, for he has known darkness and light and the minds of many men; most surely, too, he has known that God fulfils Himself in strange ways, so with the shadow of his feet upon the polished floor he rests in peace.

IV

ON Sunday my little tree was limned in white and the sparrows were craving shelter at my window from the blizzard. Now the mild thin air brings a breath of spring in its wake and the daffodils in the garden wait the kisses of the sun. Hand-in-hand with memory I slip away down the years, and remember a day when I awoke at earliest dawn, for across my sleep I had heard the lusty golden-throated trumpeters heralding the spring.

The air was sharp-set; a delicate rime frosted roof and road; the sea lay hazy and still like a great pearl. Then as the sky stirred with flush upon flush of warm rosy light, it passed from misty pearl to opal with heart of flame, from opal to gleaming sapphire. The earth called, the fields called, the river called —that pied piper to whose music a man cannot stop his ears. It was with me as with the Canterbury pilgrims:—

> "So priketh hem nature in hir corages;
> Than longen folk to gon on pilgrimages."

Half an hour later I was away by the early train that carries the branch mails and a few workmen, and was delivered at the little wayside station with the letters. The kind air went singing past as I swung along the reverberating road between the high tree-crowned banks which we call hedges in merry Devon, with all the world to myself and the Brethren. A great blackbird flew out with a loud " chook, chook," and the red of the haw on his yellow bill. A robin trilled from a low rose-bush; two wrens searched diligently on a fallen tree for breakfast, quite unconcerned when I rested a moment beside them; and a shrewmouse slipped across the road followed directly by its mate. March violets bloomed under the sheltered hedge with here and there a pale primrose; a frosted bramble spray still held its autumn tints clinging to the semblance of the past; and great branches of snowy blackthorn broke the barren hedgeway as if spring made a mock of winter's snows.

Light of heart and foot with the new wine of the year I sped on again, stray daffodils lighting the wayside, until I heard the voice

of the stream and reached the field gate which leads to the lower meadows. There before me lay spring's pageant; green pennons waving, dainty maids curtseying, and a host of joyous yellow trumpeters proclaiming " Victory " to an awakened earth. They range in serried ranks right down to the river, so that a man must walk warily to reach the water's edge where they stand gazing down at themselves in fairest semblance like their most tragic progenitor, and, rising from the bright grass in their thousands, stretch away until they melt in a golden cloud at the far end of the misty mead. Through the field gate and across the road I see them, starring the steep earth bank that leads to the upper copse, gleaming like pale flames against the dark tree-boles. There they have but frail tenure; here, in the meadows, they reign supreme.

At the upper end of the field the river provides yet closer sanctuary for these children of the spring. Held in its embracing arms lies an island long and narrow, some thirty feet by twelve, a veritable untrod Eldorado, glorious in gold from end to end, a fringe of

reeds by the water's edge, and save for that—daffodils. A great oak stands at the meadow's neck, an oak with gnarled and wandering roots where a man may rest, for it is bare of daffodils save for a group of three, and a solitary one apart growing close to the old tree's side. I sat down by my lonely little sister, blue sky overhead, green grass at my feet decked, like the pastures of the Blessèd, in glorious sheen; a sea of triumphant, golden heads tossing blithely back as the wind swept down to play with them at his pleasure.

It was all mine to have and to hold without severing a single slender stem or harbouring a thought of covetousness; mine, as the whole earth was mine, to appropriate to myself without the burden and bane of worldly possession. "Thou sayest that I am—a King," said the Lord before Pilate, and "My kingdom is not of this world." We who are made kings after His likeness possess all things, not after this world's fashion, but in proportion to our poverty; and when we cease to toil and spin, are arrayed as the lilies, in a glory transcending Solomon's. Bride Poverty—she who climbed

the Cross with Christ—stretches out eager hands to free us from our chains, but we flee from her, and lay up treasure against her importunity, while Amytas on his seaweed bed weeps tears of pure pity for crave-mouth Cæsar of great possessions.

Presently another of spring's lovers cried across the water "Cuckoo, cuckoo," and the voice of the stream sang joyously in unison. It is free from burden, this merry little river, and neither weir nor mill bars its quick way to the sea as it completes the eternal circle, lavishing gifts of coolness and refreshment on the children of the meadows.

It has its birth on the great lone moor, cradled in a wonderful peat-smelling bog, with a many-hued coverlet of soft mosses—pale gold, orange, emerald, tawny, olive and white, with the red stain of sun-dew and tufted cotton-grass. Under the old grey rocks which watch it rise, yellow-eyed tormantil stars the turf, and bids "Godspeed" to the little child of earth and sky. Thus the journey begins; and with ever-increasing strength the stream carves a way through the dear brown peat,

wears a fresh wrinkle on the patient stones, and patters merrily under a clapper bridge which spanned its breadth when the mistletoe reigned and Bottor, the grim rock idol, exacted the toll of human life that made him great. On and on goes the stream, for it may not stay; leaving of its freshness with the great osmunda that stretches eager roots towards the running water; flowing awhile with a brother stream, to part again east and west as each takes up his separate burden of service—my friend to cherish the lower meadows in their flowery joyance—and so by the great sea-gate back to sky and earth again.

The river of God is full of water. The streets of the City are pure gold. Verily, here also having nothing we possess all things.

The air was keen and still as I walked back in the early evening, and a daffodil light was in the sky as if Heaven mirrored back earth's radiance. Near the station some children flitted past, like little white miller moths homing through the dusk. As I climbed the hill the moon rode high in a golden field—it was daffodils to the last.

V

THE seagulls from the upper reaches pass down the river in sober steady flight seeking the open sea. I shall miss the swoop and circle of silver wings in the sunlight and the plaintive call which sounds so strangely away from rock and shore, but it is good to know that they have gone from mudbank and murky town back to the free airs of their inheritance, to the shadow of sun-swept cliffs and the curling crest of the wind-beaten waves, to brood again over the great ocean of a world's tears.

My little tree is gemmed with buds, shy, immature, but full of promise. The sparrows busied with nest-building in the neighbouring pipes and gutters use it for a vantage ground, and crowd there in numbers, each little beak sealed with long golden straw or downy feather.

The river is heavy with hay barges, the last fruits of winter's storehouse; the lengthening days slowly and steadily oust the dark; the air is loud with a growing clamour of life:

spring is not only proclaimed, but on this Feast she is crowned, and despite the warring wind the days bring their meed of sunshine. We stand for a moment at the meeting of the ways, the handclasp of Winter and Spring, of Sleep and Wakening, of Life and Death; and there is between them not even the thin line which Rabbi Jochanan on his death-bed beheld as all that divided hell from heaven.

"*Sphæra cujus centrum ubique, circumferentia nullibi,*" was said of Mercury, that messenger of the gods who marshalled reluctant spirits to the Underworld; and for Mercury we may write Life with Death as its great sacrament of brotherhood and release, to be dreaded only as we dread to partake unworthily of great benefits. Like all sacraments it has its rightful time and due solemnities; the horror and sin of suicide lie in the presumption of free will, the forestalling of a gift,—the sin of Eve in Paradise, who took that which might only be given at the hand of the Lord. It has too its physical pains, but they are those of a woman in travail, and we remember them no more for joy that a child-man is born into

the world naked and not ashamed: beholding ourselves as we are we shall see also the leaves of the Tree of Life set for the healing of the nations.

We are slowly, very slowly, abandoning our belief in sudden and violent transitions for a surer and fuller acceptance of the doctrine of evolution; but most of us still draw a sharp line of demarcation between this world and the next, and expect a radical change in ourselves and our surroundings, a break in the chain of continuity entirely contrary to the teaching of nature and experience. In the same way we cling to the specious untruth that we can begin over and over again in this world, forgetting that while our sorrow and repentance bring sacramental gifts of grace and strength, God Himself cannot, by His own limitation, rewrite the Past. We are in our sorrow that which we have made ourselves in our sin; our temptations are there as well as the way of escape. We are in the image of God. We create our world, our undying selves, our heaven, or our hell. "*Qui creavit te sine te non salvabit te sine te.*" It is stu-

pendous, magnificent, and most appalling. A man does not change as he crosses the threshold of the larger room. His personality remains the same, although the expression of it may be altered. Here we have material bodies in a material world—there, perhaps, ether bodies in an ether world. There is no indecency in reasonable speculation and curiosity about the life to come. One end of the thread is between our fingers, but we are haunted for the most part by the snap of Atropos' shears.

Socrates faced death with the magnificent calm bred of dignified familiarity. He had built for himself a desired heaven of colour, light, and precious stones—the philosophic formula of those who set the spiritual above the material, and worship truth in the beauty of holiness. He is not troubled by doubts or regrets, for the path of the just lies plain before his face. He forbids mourning and lamentations as out of place, obeys minutely and cheerily the directions of his executioner, and passes with unaffected dignity to the apprehension of that larger truth for which he had constantly prepared himself. His friends may

bury him provided they will remember they are not burying Socrates; and that all things may be done decently and in order, a cock must go to Æsculapius.

Long before, in the days of the Captivity, there lived in godless, blood-shedding Nineveh an exiled Jew whose father had fallen from the faith. He was a simple man, childlike and direct; living the careful, kindly life of an orthodox Jew, suffering many persecutions for conscience' sake, and in constant danger of death. He narrates the story of his life and of the blindness which fell on him, with gentle placidity, and checks the exuberance of his more emotional wife with the assurance of untroubled faith. Finally, when his pious expectations are fulfilled, his sight restored, and his son prosperously established beside him, he breaks into a prayer of rejoicing which reveals the secret of his confident content. He made use of two great faculties: the sense of proportion, which enabled him to apprise life and its accidents justly, and the gift of inseeing, which led Socrates after him, and Blessed John in lonely exile on Patmos, to look through

the things temporal to the hidden meanings of eternity.

"Let my soul bless God the great King," he cries; and looks away past the present distress; past the Restoration which was to end in fresh scattering and confusion; past the dream of gold, and porphyry, and marble defaced by the eagles and emblems of the conqueror; until his eyes are held by the Jerusalem of God, "built up with sapphires, and emeralds, and precious stones," with battlements of pure gold, and the cry of "Alleluia" in her streets.

Many years later, when he was very aged, he called his son to him and gave him as heritage his own simple rule of life, adding but one request: "Keep thou the law and the commandments, and shew thyself merciful and just, that it may go well with thee. . . . Consider what alms doeth, and how righteousness doth deliver. . . . And bury me decently, and thy mother with me." Having so said, he went his way quietly and contentedly to the Jerusalem of his heart.

It is the simple note of familiarity that is

wanting in us; that by which we link world with world. Once, years ago, I sat by the bedside of a dying man in a wretched garret in the East End. He was entirely ignorant, entirely quiescent, and entirely uninterested. The minister of a neighbouring chapel came to see him and spoke to him at some length of the need for repentance and the joys of heaven. After he had gone my friend lay staring restlessly at the mass of decrepit broken chimney pots which made his horizon. At last he spoke, and there was a new note in his voice:—

"Ee said as 'ow there were golding streets in them parts. I ain't no ways particler wot they 're made of, but it 'll feel natral like if there 's chimleys too."

The sun stretched a sudden finger and painted the chimney pots red and gold against the smoke-dimmed sky, and with his face alight with surprised relief my friend died.

We are one with the earth, one in sin, one in redemption. It is the fringe of the garment of God. "If I may but touch the hem," said a certain woman.

On the great Death-day which shadows the early spring with a shadow of which it may be said *Umbra Dei est Lux*, the earth brought gifts of grief, the fruit of the curse, barren thorns, hollow reed, and the wood of the cross; the sea made offering of Tyrian purple; the sky veiled her face in great darkness, while the nation of priests crucified for the last time their Paschal lamb. "I will hear, saith the Lord; I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn and wine and oil, and they shall hear Jezreel, and I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy, and I will say unto them which were not my people, 'Thou art my people,' and they shall say 'Thou art my God.'"

The second Adam stood in the garden with quickening feet, and all the earth pulsed and sang for joy of the new hope and the new life quickening within her, to be hers through the pains of travail, the pangs of dissolution. The Tree of Life bears Bread and Wine—food of the wayfaring man. The day of divisions is

past, the day of unity has dawned. One has risen from the dead, and in the Valley of Achor stands wide the Door of Hope—the Sacrament of Death.

Scio Domine, et vere scio . . . quia non sum dignus accedere ad tantum mysterium propter nimia peccata mea et infinitas negligentias meas. Sed scio . . . quia tu potes me facere dignum.

VI

"ANYTUS and Meletus can kill me, but they cannot hurt me," said Socrates; and Governor Sancho, with all the itch of newly acquired authority, could not make the young weaver of steel-heads for lances sleep in prison. In the Vision of Er the souls passed straight forward under the throne of necessity, and out into the plains of forgetfulness, where they must severally drink of the river of unmindfulness whose waters cannot be held in any vessel. The throne, the plain, and the river are still here, but in the distance rise the great lone heavenward hills, and the wise among us no longer ask of the gods Lethe, but rather remembrance. Necessity can set me helpless on my back, but she cannot keep me there; nor can four walls limit my vision. I pass out from under her throne into the garden of God a free man, to my ultimate beatitude or my exceeding shame. All day long this world lies open to me; ay, and other worlds also, if

I will but have it so; and when night comes I pass into the kingdom and power of the dark.

I lie through the long hours and watch my bridge, which is set with lights across the gloom; watch the traffic which is for me but so many passing lamps telling their tale by varying height and brightness. I hear under my window the sprint of over-tired horses; the rattle of uncertain wheels as the street-sellers hasten south; the jangle of cab bells as the theatre-goers take their homeward way; the gruff altercation of weary men, the unmelodious song and clamorous laugh of women whose merriment is wearier still. Then comes a time of stillness when the light in the sky waxes and wanes, when the cloud-drifts obscure the stars, and I gaze out into blackness set with watching eyes. No sound comes from without but the voice of the night-wind and the cry of the hour. The clock on the mantelpiece ticks imperatively, for a check has fallen on the familiarity which breeds a disregard of common things, and a reason has to be sought for each sound which claims a hearing. The

pause is wonderful while it lasts, but it is not for long. The working world awakes, the poorer brethren take up the burden of service; the dawn lights the sky; remembrance cries an end to forgetting.

Sometimes in the country on a night in early summer you may shut the cottage door to step out into an immense darkness which palls heaven and earth. Going forward into the embrace of the great gloom, you are as a babe swaddled by the hands of night into helpless quiescence. Your feet tread an unseen path, your hands grasp at a void, or shrink from the contact they cannot realise; your eyes are holden; your voice would die in your throat did you seek to rend the veil of that impenetrable silence.

Shut in by the intangible dark, we are brought up against those worlds within worlds blotted out by our concrete daily life. The working of the great microcosm at which we peer dimly through the little window of science; the wonderful, breathing earth; the pulsing, throbbing sap; the growing fragrance shut in the calyx of to-morrow's flower; the

heart-beat of a sleeping world that we dream that we know; and around, above, and interpenetrating all, the world of dreams, of angels and of spirits.

It was this world which Jacob saw on the first night of his exile, and again when he wrestled in Peniel until the break of day. It was this world which Elisha saw with open eyes; which Job knew when darkness fell on him; which Ezekiel gazed into from his place among the captives; which Daniel beheld as he stood alone by the great river, the river Hiddekel.

For the moment we have left behind the realm of question and explanation, of power over matter and the exercise of bodily faculties; and passed into darkness alight with visions we cannot see, into silence alive with voices we cannot hear. Like helpless men we set our all on the one thing left us, and lift up our hearts, knowing that we are but a mere speck among a myriad worlds, yet greater than the sum of them; having our roots in the dark places of the earth, but our branches in the sweet airs of heaven.

It is the material counterpart of the " Night of the Soul." We have left our house and set forth in the darkness which paralyses those faculties that make us men in the world of men. But surely the great mystics, with all their insight and heavenly love, fell short when they sought freedom in complete separateness from creation instead of in perfect unity with it. The Greeks knew better when they flung Ariadne's crown among the stars, and wrote Demeter's grief on a barren earth, and Persephone's joy in the fruitful field. For the earth is gathered up in man; he is the whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. Standing in the image of God, and clothed in the garment of God, he lifts up priestly hands and presents the sacrifice of redeemed earth before the throne of the All-Father. " Dust and ashes and a house of devils," he cries; and there comes back for answer, " *Rex concupíscet decorem tuam.*"

The Angel of Death has broad wings of silence and mystery with which he shadows the valley where we need fear no evil, and where the voice which speaks to us is as the " voice

of doves, tabering upon their breasts." It is a place of healing and preparation, of peace and refreshing after the sharply defined outlines of a garish day. Walking there we learn to use those natural faculties of the soul which are hampered by the familiarity of bodily progress, to apprehend the truths which we have intellectually accepted. It is the place of secrets where the humility which embraces all attainable knowledge cries "I know not"; and while we proclaim from the house-tops that which we have learnt, the manner of our learning lies hid for each one of us in the sanctuary of our souls.

The Egyptians, in their ancient wisdom, set in the desert a great androsphinx, image of mystery and silence, staring from under level brows across the arid sands of the sea-way. The Greeks borrowed and debased the image, turning the inscrutable into a semi-woman who asked a foolish riddle, and hurled herself down in petulant pride when Œdipus answered aright. So we, marring the office of silence, question its mystery; thwart ourselves with riddles of our own suggesting; and turn away,

leaving our offering but half consumed on the altar of the unknown god. It was not the theft of fire that brought the vengeance of heaven upon Prometheus, but the mocking sacrifice. Orpheus lost Eurydice because he must see her face before the appointed time. Persephone ate of the pomegranate and hungered in gloom for the day of light which should have been endless.

The universe is full of miracle and mystery; the darkness and silence are set for a sign we dare not despise. The pall of night lifts, leaving us engulphed in the light of immensity under a tossing heaven of stars. The dawn breaks, but it does not surprise us, for we have watched from the valley and seen the pale twilight. Through the wondrous Sabbath of faithful souls, the long day of rosemary and rue, the light brightens in the East; and we pass on towards it with quiet feet and opening eyes, bearing with us all of the redeemed earth that we have made our own, until we are fulfilled in the sunrise of the great Easter Day, and the peoples come from north and south and east and west to the City

which lieth foursquare—the Beatific Vision of God.

Vere Ierusalem est illa civitas
Cuius pax iugis et summa iucunditas;
Ubi non prævenit rem desiderium,
Nec desiderio minus est præmium.

AT THE WHITE GATE

I

A GREAT joy has come to me; one of those unexpected gifts which life loves to bestow after we have learnt to loose our grip of her. I am back in my own place very near my road —the white gate lies within my distant vision; near the lean grey Downs which keep watch and ward between the country and the sea; very near, nay, in the lap of Mother Earth, for as I write I am lying on a green carpet, powdered yellow and white with the sun's own flowers; overhead a great sycamore where the bees toil and sing; and sighing shimmering poplars golden grey against the blue. The day of Persephone has dawned for me, and I, set free like Demeter's child, gladden my eyes with this foretaste of coming radiance, and rest my tired sense with the scent and sound of home. Away down the meadow I hear the early scythe song, and the warm air is fragrant with the fallen grass. It has its own message for me as I lie here, I who have ob-

tained yet one more mercy, and the burden of it is life, not death.

I remember when, taking a grace from my road, I helped to mow Farmer Marler's ten-acre field, rich in ripe upstanding grass. The mechanism of the ancient reaper had given way under the strain of the home meadows, and if this crop was to be saved it must be by hand. I have kept the record of those days of joyous labour under a June sky. Men were hard to get in our village; old Dodden, who was over seventy, volunteered his services—he had done yeoman work with the scythe in his youth—and two of the farm hands with their master completed our strength.

We took our places under a five o'clock morning sky, and the larks cried down to us as we stood knee-deep in the fragrant dew-steeped grass, each man with his gleaming scythe poised ready for its sweeping swing. Old Dodden led by right of age and ripe experience; bent like a sickle, brown and dry as a nut, his face a tracery of innumerable wrinkles, he has never ailed a day, and the cunning of his craft was still with him. At first

we worked stiffly, unreadily, but soon the monotonous motion possessed us with its insistent rhythm, and the grass bowed to each sibilant swish and fell in sweet-smelling swathes at our feet. Now and then a startled rabbit scurried through the miniature forest to vanish with white flick of tail in the tangled hedge; here and there a mother lark was discovered sitting motionless, immovable upon her little brood; but save for these infrequent incidents we paced steadily on with no speech save the cry of the hone on the steel and the swish of the falling swathes. The sun rose high in the heaven and burnt on bent neck and bare and aching arms, the blood beat and drummed in my veins, with the unwonted posture and exercise; I worked as a man who sees and hears in a mist. Once, as I paused to whet my scythe, my eye caught the line of the untroubled hills strong and still in the broad sunshine; then to work again in the labouring, fertile valley.

Rest time came, and wiping the sweat from brow and blade we sought the welcome shadow of the hedge and the cool sweet oatmeal water

with which the wise reaper quenches his thirst. Farmer Marler hastened off to see with master-eye that all went well elsewhere; the farm men slept tranquilly, stretched at full length, clasped hands for pillow; and old Dodden, sitting with crooked fingers interlaced to check their trembling betrayal of old age, told how in his youth he had " swep " a four-acre field single-handed in three days—an almost impossible feat—and of the first reaping machine in these parts, and how it brought, to his thinking, the ruin of agricultural morals with it. " 'T is again nature," he said, " the Lard gave us the land an' the seed, but 'Ee said that a man should sweat. Where 's the sweat drivin' round wi' two horses cuttin' the straw down an' gatherin' it again, wi' scarce a hand's turn i' the day's work ? "

Old Dodden's high-pitched quavering voice rose and fell, mournful as he surveyed the present, vehement as he recorded the heroic past. He spoke of the rural exodus and shook his head mournfully. " We old 'uns were content wi' earth and the open sky like our feythers before us, but wi' the children 't is

first machines to save doin' a hand's turn o' honest work, an' then land an' sky ain't big enough seemin'ly, nor grand enough; it must be town an' a paved street, an' they sweat their lives out atwixt four walls an' call it seein' life—'t is death an' worse comes to most of 'em. Ay, 't is better to stay by the land, as the Lard said, till time comes to lie under it." I looked away across the field where the hot air throbbed and quivered, and the fallen grass, robbed already of its freshness, lay prone at the feet of its upstanding fellows. It is quite useless to argue with old Dodden; he only shakes his head and says firmly, " An old man, seventy-five come Martinmass, knows more o' life than a young chap, stands ter reason " ; besides, his epitome of the town life he knows nothing of was a just one as far as it went; and his own son is the sweeper of a Holborn crossing, and many other things that he should not be; but that is the parson's secret and mine.

We took rank again and swept steadily on through the hot still hours into the evening shadows, until the sinking sun set a *Gloria* to

the psalm of another working day. Only a third of the field lay mown, for we were not skilled labourers to cut our acre a day; I saw it again that night under the moonlight and the starlight, wrapped in a shroud of summer's mist.

The women joined us on the third day to begin haymaking, and the air was fragrant of tossed and sun-dried grass. One of them walked apart from the rest, without interest or freedom of movement; her face, sealed and impassive, was aged beyond the vigour of her years. I knew the woman by sight, and her history by hearsay. We have a code of morals here—not indeed peculiar to this place or people—that a wedding is " respectable " if it precedes child-birth by a bare month, tolerable, and to be recognised, should it succeed the same by less than a year (provided the pair are not living in the same village); but the child that has never been " fathered " and the wife without a ring are " anathema," and such an one was Elizabeth Banks. She went away a maid and came back a year ago with a child and without a name. Her mother

was dead, her father and the village would have none of her: the homing instinct is very strong, or she would scarcely have returned, knowing the traditions of the place. Old Dodden, seeing her, grumbled to me in the rest-time: — "Can't think what the farmer wants wi' Lizzie Banks in 'is field." "She must live," I said, "and by all showing her life is a hard one." "She 'ad the makin' of 'er bed," he went on, obstinately. "What for do she bring her disgrace home, wi' a fatherless brat for all folks to see? We don't want them sort in our village. The Lard's hand is heavy, an' a brat 's a curse that cannot be hid."

When tea-time came I crossed the field to look for a missing hone, and saw Elizabeth Banks far from the other women, busied with a bundle under the hedge. I passed close on my search, and lo! the bundle was a little boy. He lay smiling and stretching, fighting the air with his small pink fists, while the wind played with his curls. "A curse that cannot be hid," old Dodden had said. The mother knelt a moment, devouring him with her eyes, then snatched him to her with aching greed and

covered him with kisses. I saw the poor, plain face illumined, transfigured, alive with a mother's love, and remembered how the word came once to a Hebrew prophet:—

Say unto your Brethren Ammi, and to your sisters Ruhamah.

The evening sky was clouding fast, the sound of rain was in the air; Farmer Marler shook his head as he looked at the grass lying in ordered rows. I was the last to leave, and as I lingered at the gate drinking in the scent of the field and the cool of the coming rain, the first drops fell on my upturned face and kissed the poor dry swathes at my feet, and I was glad.

David, child of the fields and the sheep-folds, his kingship laid aside, sees through the parted curtain of the years the advent of his greater Son, and cries in his psalm of the hill-tops, his last prophetic prayer:—

He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass.

Even so He came, and shall still come.

Three days ago the field, in its pageant of fresh beauty, with shimmering blades and tossing banners, greeted sun and shower alike with joy for the furtherance of its life and purpose; now, laid low, it hears the young grass whisper the splendour of its coming green; and the poor swathes are glad at the telling, but full of grief for their own apparent failure. Then in great pity comes the rain, the rain of summer, gentle, refreshing, penetrating, and the swathes are comforted, for they know that standing to greet or prostrate to suffer, the consolations of the former and the latter rain are still their own, with tender touch and cool caress. Then, once more parched by the sun, they are borne away to the new service their apparent failure has fitted them for; and perhaps as they wait in the dark for the unknown that is still to come they hear sometimes the call of the distant rain, and at the sound the dry sap stirs afresh—they are not forgotten and can wait.

"*Say unto your sisters Ruhamah*," cries the prophet.

"*He shall come down like rain upon the*

mown grass," sang the poet of the sheep-folds.

"*My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.*"

I remember how I went home along the damp sweet-scented lanes through the grey mist of the rain, thinking of the mown field and Elizabeth Banks and many, many more; and that night, when the sky had cleared and the nightingale sang, I looked out at the moon riding at anchor, a silver boat in a still blue sea ablaze with the headlights of the stars, and the saying of the herdsman of Tekoa came to me—as it has come oftentimes since:—

Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of earth; the Lord is His name.

II

THIS garden is an epitome of peace; sun and wind, rain, flowers, and birds gather me into the blessedness of their active harmony. The world holds no wish for me, now that I have come home to die with my own people, for verily I think that the sap of grass and trees must run in my veins, so steady is their pull upon my heart-strings. London claimed all my philosophy, but the country gives all, and asks of me only the warm receptivity of a child in its mother's arms.

When I lie in my cool light room on the garden level, I look across the bright grass—*il verde smalto*—to a great red rose bush in lavish disarray against the dark cypress. Near by, amid a tangle of many-hued corn-flowers I see the promise of coming lilies, the sudden crimson of a solitary pæony; and in lowlier state against the poor parched earth glow the golden cups of the eschscholtzias. Beyond the low hedge lies pasture bright with buttercups,

where the cattle feed. Farther off, where the scythe has been busy, are sheep, clean and shorn, with merry, well-grown lambs; and in the farthest field I can see the great horses moving in slow steady pace as the farmer turns his furrow.

The birds are noisy comrades and old friends, from the lark which chants the dew-steeped morning, to the nightingale that breaks the silence of the most wonderful nights. I hear the wisdom of the rooks in the great elms; the lifting lilt of the linnet, and the robin's quaint little summer song. The starlings chatter ceaselessly, their queer strident voices harsh against the melodious gossip of the other birds; the martins shrill softly as they swoop to and fro busied with their nesting under the eaves; thrush and blackbird vie in friendly rivalry like the Meister-singer of old; sometimes I hear the drawling cry of a peacock strayed from the great house, or the laugh of the woodpecker; and at night the hunting note of the owl reaches me as he sweeps by in search of prey.

To-day I am out again; and the great syca-

more showers honey and flowers on me as I lie beneath it. Sometimes a bee falls like an over-ripe fruit, and waits awhile to clean his pollen-coated legs ere he flies home to discharge his burden. He is too busy to be friendly, but his great velvety cousin is much more sociable, and stays for a gentle rub between his noisy shimmering wings, and a nap in the hollow of my hand, for he is an idle friendly soul with plenty of time at his own disposal and no responsibilities. Looking across I can watch the martins at work; they have a starling and a sparrow for near neighbours in the wooden gutter. One nest is already complete all but the coping, the other two are a-building: I wonder whether I or they will be first to go south through the mist.

This great tree is a world in itself, and the denizens appear full of curiosity as to the Gulliver who has taken up his abode beneath it. Pale green caterpillars and spiders of all sizes come spinning down to visit me, and have to be persuaded with infinite difficulty to ascend their threads again. There are flies with beautiful iridescent wings, beetles of all shapes,

some of them like tiny jewels in the sunlight. Their nomenclature is a sealed book to me; of their life and habits I know nothing; yet this is but a little corner of the cosmos I am leaving, and I feel not so much desire for the beauty to come, as a great longing to open my eyes a little wider during the time which remains to me in this beautiful world of God's making, where each moment tells its own tale of active, progressive life in which there is no undoing. Nature knows naught of the web of Penelope, that acme of anxious pathetic waiting, but goes steadily on in ever widening circle towards the fulfilment of the mystery of God.

There are, I take it, two master-keys to the secrets of the universe, viewed *sub specie æternitatis*, the Incarnation of God, and the Personality of Man; with these it is true for us as for the pantheistic little man of contemptible speech, that "all things are ours," yea, even unto the third heaven.

I have lost my voracious appetite for books; their language is less plain than scent and song and the wind in the trees; and for me

the clue to the next world lies in the wisdom of earth rather than in the learning of men. "*Libera me ab fuscina Hophni*," prayed the good Bishop fearful of religious greed. I know too much, not too little; it is realisation that I lack, wherefore I desire these last days to confirm in myself the sustaining goodness of God, the love which is our continuing city, the New Jerusalem whose length, breadth, and height are all one. It is a time of exceeding peace. There is a place waiting for me under the firs in the quiet churchyard; thanks to my poverty I have no worldly anxieties or personal dispositions; and I am rich in friends, many of them unknown to me, who lavishly supply my needs and make it ideal to live on the charity of one's fellow-men. I am most gladly in debt to all the world; and to Earth, my mother, for her great beauty.

I can never remember the time when I did not love her, this mother of mine with her wonderful garments and ordered loveliness, her tender care and patient bearing of man's burden. In the earliest days of my lonely childhood I used to lie chin on hand amid the

milkmaids, red sorrel, and heavy spear-grass listening to her many voices, and above all to the voice of the little brook which ran through the meadows where I used to play: I think it has run through my whole life also, to lose itself at last, not in the great sea, but in the river that maketh glad the City of God. Valley and plain, mountain and fruitful field; the lark's song and the speedwell in the grass; surely a man need not sigh for greater loveliness until he has read something more of this living letter, and knelt before that earth of which he is the only confusion.

It is a grave matter that the word religion holds such sway among us, making the very gap seem to yawn again which the Incarnation once and for ever filled full. We have banished the protecting gods that ruled in river and mountain, tree and grove; we have gainsaied for the most part folk-lore and myth, superstition and fairy-tale, evil only in their abuse. We have done away with mystery, or named it deceit. All this we have done in an enlightened age, but despite this policy of destruction we have left ourselves a

belief, the grandest and most simple the world has ever known, which sanctifies the water that is shed by every passing cloud; and gathers up in its great central act vineyard and cornfield, proclaiming them to be that Life of the world without which a man is dead while he liveth. Further, it is a belief whose foundations are the most heavenly mystery of the Trinity, but whose centre is a little Child: it sets a price upon the head of the sparrow, and reckons the riches of this world at their true value; it points to a way of holiness where the fool shall not err, and the sage may find the realisation of his far-seeking; and yet, despite its inclusiveness, is is a belief which cannot save the birds from destruction, the silent mountains from advertisement, or the stream from pollution, in an avowedly Christian land. John Ruskin scolded and fought and did yeoman service, somewhat hindered by his over-good conceit of himself; but it is not the worship of beauty we need so much as the beauty of holiness. Little by little the barrier grows and " religion " becomes a *rule* of life, not life itself, although the Bride stands ready to in-

terpret, likened in her loveliness to the chief treasures of her handmaid—Earth. There is more truth in the believing cry, "Come from thy white cliffs, O Pan!" than in the religion that measures a man's life by the letter of the Ten Commandments, and erects itself as judge and ruler over him, instead of throwing open the gate of the garden where God walks with man from morning until morning.

As I write the sun is setting; in the pale radiance of the sky above his glory there dawns the evening star; and Earth like a tired child turns her face to the bosom of the night.

III

ONCE again I have paid a rare visit to my tree to find many things changed since my last sojourn there. The bees are silent, for the honey-laden flowers of the sycamore are gone and in their place hang dainty two-fold keys. The poplar has lost its metallic shimmer, the chestnut its tall white candles; and the sound of the wind in the fully-leaved branches is like the sighing of the sea. The martins' nests are finished, and one is occupied by a shrill-voiced brood; but for the most part the birds' parental cares are over, and the nestlings in bold flight no longer flutter on inefficient wings across the lawn with clamorous, open bill. The robins show promise of their ruddy vests, the slim young thrush is diligently practising maturer notes, and soon Maid June will have fled.

It is such a wonderful world that I cannot find it in my heart to sigh for fresh beauty amid these glories of the Lord on which I look,

seeing men as trees walking, in my material impotence which awaits the final anointing. The marigolds with their orange suns, the lilies' white flame, the corncockle's blue crown of many flowers, the honeysuckle's horn of fragrance—I can paraphrase them, name, class, dissect them; and then, save for the purposes of human intercourse, I stand where I stood before, my world bounded by my capacity, the secret of colour and fragrance still kept. It is difficult to believe that the second lesson will not be the sequence of the first, and death prove a "feast of opening eyes" to all these wonders, instead of the heavy-lidded slumber to which we so often liken it. "Earth to earth?" Yes, "dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," but what of the rest? What of the folded grave clothes, and the Forty Days? If the next state be, as it well might, space of four dimensions, and the first veil which will lift for me be the material one, then the "other" world which is hidden from our grosser material organism will lie open, and declare still further to my widening eyes and unstopped ears the glory and purpose

of the manifold garment of God. Knowledge will give place to understanding in that second chamber of the House of Wisdom and Love. Revelation is always measured by capacity: "Open thy mouth wide," and it shall be filled with a satisfaction that in itself is desire.

There is a child here, a happy quiet little creature holding gently to its two months of life. Sometimes they lay it beside me, I the more helpless of the two—perhaps the more ignorant—and equally dependent for the supply of my smallest need. I feel indecently large as I survey its minute perfections and the tiny balled fist lying in my great palm. The little creature fixes me with the wise wide stare of a soul in advance of its medium of expression; and I, gazing back at the mystery in those eyes, feel the thrill of contact between my worn and sin-stained self and the innocence of a little white child. It is wonderful to watch a woman's rapturous familiarity with these newcomers. A man's love has far more awe in it, and the passionate animal instinct of defence is wanting in him. "A woman shall be saved through the child-bearing," said St.

Paul; not necessarily her own, but by participation in the great act of motherhood which is the crown and glory of her sex. She is the "prisoner of love," caught in a net of her own weaving; held fast by little hands which rule by impotence, pursued by feet the swifter for their faltering.

It seems incredible that this is what a woman will barter for the right to "live her own life"—surely the most empty of desires. Man—*vir*, woman—*femina*, go to make up *the* man—*homo*. There can be no comparison, no rivalry between them; they are the complement of each other, and a little child shall lead them. It is easy to understand that desire to shelter under the dear mantle of motherhood which has led to one of the abuses of modern Romanism. I met an old peasant couple at Bornhofen who had tramped many weary miles to the famous shrine of Our Lady to plead for their only son. They had a few pence saved for a candle, and afterwards when they told me their tale the old woman heaved a sigh of relief, "Es wird bald gut gehen: Die da, Sie versteht," and I saw her later paying

a farewell visit to the great understanding Mother whom she could trust. Superstitious misapprehension if you will, but also the recognition of a divine principle.

It was Behmen, I believe, who cried with the breath of inspiration, " Only when I know God shall I know myself " ; and so man remains the last of all the riddles, to be solved it may be only in Heaven's perfection and the light of the Beatific Vision. " Know thyself " is a vain legend, the more so when emphasised by a skull; and so I company with a friend and a stranger, and looking across at the white gate I wonder concerning the quiet pastures and still waters that lie beyond, even as Brother Ambrose wondered long years ago in the monastery by the forest.

The Brother Ambrose was ever a saintly man approved of God and beloved by the Brethren. To him one night, as he lay abed in the dormitory, came the word of the Lord, saying, " Come, and I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb's wife." And Brother Ambrose arose and was carried to a great and high mountain, even as in the Vision of Blessed John. 'T was a still night of many stars, and Brother Ambrose, looking up, saw a radiant path in the

heavens; and lo! the stars gathered themselves together on either side until they stood as walls of light, and the four winds lapped him about as in a mantle and bore him towards the wondrous gleaming roadway. Then between the stars came the Holy City with roof and pinnacle aflame, and walls aglow with such colours as no earthly limner dreams of, and much gold. Brother Ambrose beheld the Gates of Pearl, and by every gate an angel with wings of snow and fire, and a face no man dare look on because of its exceeding radiance.

Then as Brother Ambrose stretched out his arms because of his great longing, a little grey cloud came out of the north and hung between the walls of light, so that he no longer beheld the Vision, but only heard a sound as of a great multitude crying "Alleluia"; and suddenly the winds came about him again, and lo! he found himself in his bed in the dormitory, and it was midnight, for the bell was ringing to Matins; and he rose and went down with the rest. But when the Brethren left the choir Brother Ambrose stayed fast in his place, hearing and seeing nothing because of the Vision of God; and at Lauds they found him and told the Prior.

He questioned Brother Ambrose of the matter, and when he heard the Vision bade him limn the Holy City even as he had seen it; and the Precentor gave him uterine vellum and much fine gold and what colours he asked for the work. Then Brother Ambrose limned a wondrous fair city of gold with

turrets and spires; and he inlaid blue for the sapphire and green for the emerald, and vermilion where the city seemed aflame with the glory of God; but the angels he could not limn, nor could he set the rest of the colours as he saw them, nor the wall of stars on either hand; and Brother Ambrose fell sick because of the exceeding great longing he had to limn the Holy City, and was very sad; but the Prior bade him thank God, and remember the infirmity of the flesh, which, like the little grey cloud, veiled Jerusalem to his sight.

As I write the monastery bell hard by rings out across the lark's song. They still have time for visions behind those guarding walls, but for most of us it is not so. We let slip the ideal for what we call the real, and the golden dreams vanish while we clutch at phantoms: we speed along life's pathway, counting to the full the sixty minutes of every hour, yet the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Lying here in this quiet backwater it is hard to believe that the world without is turbulent with storm and stress and the ebb and flow of uncertain tides. The little yellow cat rolling on its back among the daisies, the staid tortoise making a stately meal off the

buttercups near me, these are great events in this haven of peace. And yet, looking back to the working days, I know how much goodness and loving-kindness there is under the froth and foam. If we do not know ourselves we most certainly do not know our brethren: that revelation awaits us, it may be, first in Heaven. To have faith is to create; to have hope is to call down blessing; to have love is to work miracles. Above all let us see visions, visions of colour and light, of green fields and broad rivers, of palaces laid with fair colours, and gardens where a place is found for rosemary and rue.

It is our prerogative to be dreamers, but there will always be men ready to offer us death for our dreams. And if it must be so let us choose death; it is gain, not loss, and the gloomy portal when we reach it is but a white gate, the white gate maybe we have known all our lives barred by the tendrils of the woodbine.

IV

RAIN, rain, rain: the little flagged path outside my window is a streaming way, where the coming raindrops meet again the grey clouds whose storehouse they have but just now left. The grass grows greener as I watch it, the burnt patches fade, a thousand thirsty heads are uplifted for the cooling draught.

The great thrush that robs the raspberry canes is busy; yesterday he had little but dust for his guerdon, but now fresh, juicy fruit repays him as he swings to and fro on the pliant branches. The blackbirds and starlings find the worms an easy prey—poor brother worm ever ready for sacrifice. I can hear the soft expectant chatter of the family of martins under the roof; there will be good hunting, and they know it, for the flies are out when the rain is over, and there are clamorous mouths awaiting. My little brown brothers, the sparrows, remain my chief delight. Of all the birds these nestle closest to my heart,

be they grimy little cockneys or their trim and dainty country cousins. They come day by day for their meed of crumbs spread for them outside my window, and at this season they eat leisurely and with good appetite, for there are no hungry babies pestering to be fed. Very early in the morning I hear the whirr and rustle of eager wings, and the tap, tap, of little beaks upon the stone. The sound carries me back, for it was the first to greet me when I rose to draw water and gather kindling in my roadmender days; and if I slip back another decade they survey me, reproving my laziness, from the foot of the narrow bed in my little attic overseas.

Looking along the roadway that we have travelled we see the landmarks, great and small, which have determined the direction of our feet. For some those of childhood stand out above all the rest; but I remember few notable ones, and those few the emphatic chord of the universe, rather than any commerce with my fellows. There was the night of my great disappointment, when I was borne from my comfortable bed to see the wonders

of the moon's eclipse. Disappointment was so great that it sealed my lips; but, once back on my pillow, I sobbed for grief that I had seen a wonder so far below my expectation. Then there was a night at Whitby, when the wind made speech impossible, and the seas rushed up and over the great lighthouse like the hungry spirits of the deep. I like better to remember the scent of the first cowslip field under the warm side of the hedge, when I sang to myself for pure joy of their colour and fragrance. Again, there were the bluebells in the deserted quarry like the backwash of a southern sea, and below them the miniature forest of sheltering bracken with its quaint conceits; and, crowned above all, the day I stood on Watcombe Down, and looked across a stretch of golden gorse and new-turned blood-red field, the green of the headland, and beyond, the sapphire sea.

Time sped, and there came a day when I first set foot on German soil and felt the throb of its paternity, the beat of our common life. England is my mother, and most dearly do I love her swelling breasts and wind-swept, salt-

strewn hair. Scotland gave me my name, with its haunting derivation handed down by brave men; but Germany has always been to me the Fatherland *par excellence*. True, my love is limited to the southern provinces, with their mediæval memories; for the progressive guttural north I have little sympathy, but the Rhine claimed me from the first, calling, calling, with that wonderful voice which speaks of death and life, of chivalry and greed of gold. If you would have the river's company you should wander, a happy solitary, along its banks, watching its gleaming current in the early morning, its golden glory as it answers the farewell of parting day. Then, in the silence of the night, you can hear the wash and eddy calling one to another, count the heart-beats of the great bearer of burdens, and watch in the moonlight the sisters of the mist as they lament with wringing hands the days that are gone.

The forests, too, are ready with story hid in the fastness of their solitude, and it is a joy to think that those great pines, pointing ever upwards, go for the most part to carry the

sails of great ships seeking afar under open sky. The forest holds other wonders still. It seems but last night that I wandered down the road which led to the little unheeded village where I had made my temporary home. The warm-scented breath of the pines and the stillness of the night wrapped me in great content; the summer lightning leapt in a lambent arch across the east, and the stars, seen dimly through the sombre tree crests, were outrivalled by the glow-worms which shone in countless points of light from bank and hedge; even two charcoal-burners, who passed with friendly greeting, had wreathed their hats with the living flame. The tiny shifting lamps were everywhere; pale yellow, purely white, or green as the underside of a northern wave. By day but an ugly, repellent worm; but darkness comes, and lo, a star alight. Nature is full for us of seeming inconsistencies and glad surprises. The world 's asleep, say you; on your ear falls the nightingale's song and the stir of living creatures in bush and brake. The mantle of night falls, and all unattended the wind leaps up and scatters the clouds

which veil the constant stars; or in the hour of the great dark, dawn parts the curtain with the long foregleam of the coming day. It is hard to turn one's back on night with her kiss of peace for tired eyelids, the kiss which is not sleep but its neglected forerunner. I made my way at last down to the vine-girt bridge asleep under the stars and up the winding stairs of the old grey tower; and a stone's-throw away the Rhine slipped quietly past in the midsummer moonlight.

Switzerland came in its turn, unearthly in its white loveliness and glory of lake and sky. But perhaps the landmark which stands out most clearly is the solitary blue gentian which I found in the short slippery grass of the Rigi, gazing up at the sky whose blue could not hope to excel it. It was my first; and what need of another, for finding one I had gazed into the mystery of all. This side the Pass, snow and the blue of heaven; later I entered Italy through fields of many-hued lilies, her past glories blazoned in the flowers of the field.

Now it is a strangely uneventful road that

leads to my White Gate. Each day questions me as it passes; each day makes answer for me "not yet." There is no material preparation to be made for this journey of mine into a far country—a simple fact which adds to the "unknowableness" of the other side. Do I travel alone, or am I one of a great company, swift yet unhurried in their passage? The voices of Penelope's suitors shrilled on the ears of Ulysses, as they journeyed to the nether-world, like nocturnal birds and bats in the inarticulateness of their speech. They had abused the gift, and fled self-condemned. Maybe silence commends itself as most suitable for the wayfarers towards the sunrise—silence because they seek the Word—but for those hastening towards the confusion they have wrought there falls already the sharp oncoming of the curse.

While we are still here the language of worship seems far, and yet lies very nigh; for what better note can our frail tongues lisp than the voice of wind and sea, river and stream, those grateful servants giving all and asking nothing, the soft whisper of snow and

rain eager to replenish, or the thunder proclaiming a majesty too great for utterance? Here, too, stands the angel with the censer gathering up the fragrance of teeming earth and forest-tree, of flower and fruit, and sweetly pungent herb distilled by sun and rain for joyful use. Here, too, come acolytes lighting the dark with tapers—sun, moon, and stars—gifts of the Lord that His sanctuary may stand ever served.

It lies here ready to our hand, this life of adoration which we needs must live hand in hand with earth, for has she not borne the curse with us? But beyond the white gate and the trail of woodbine falls the silence greater than speech, darkness greater than light, a pause of "a little while"; and then the touch of that healing garment as we pass to the King in His beauty, in a land from which there is no return.

At the gateway then I cry you farewell.

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